Transition, stagnation or regression? Democratization in the post-Soviet space

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List of Abbreviations

CEE – Central and Eastern Europe

CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States

CL – Civil Liberties

CSTO – Collective Security Treaty Organization

DV – Dependent Variable

EEU – Eurasian Economic Union

ENP – European Neighborhood Policy

EU – European Union

FH – Freedom House

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

IV – Independent Variable

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

PMR – Trans-Dniester Moldova Republic

PR – Political Rights

PSA – Product Sharing Agreement

SOCAR – State Oil Company of the Republic of Azerbaijan

SOFAZ – State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan

USG – United States Government

USA – United States of America

1. Introduction: Setting the Stage

"Although obviously there were resistance and setbacks, as in China in 1989, the movement toward democracy seemed to take on the character of an almost irresistible global tide moving from one triumph to the next". –Samuel P. Huntington (1991: 21).

1.1. The State of Democratization in the Post-Cold War Period

The end of the Cold War and the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 were, according to some observers, to herald "the end point of mankind's ideological evolution" and the "total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism".[1] Portugal's Carnation Revolution in April 1974 signified the starting point of what Samuel P. Huntington would come to refer to as the third-wave of democratization.[2] Following the military coup and revolution in Portugal, transitions away from autocracy spread and would subsequently take place throughout Southern Europe, South America and CEE. Extrapolating these initial successful transitions to democracy, it was assumed that similar processes would inevitably take hold in the post-Soviet space and elsewhere, leading to similar outcomes and improvements in democratic performance. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way sum up the initial optimism and teleological mindset of some observers regarding the future success of the third-wave of democratization in the post-Soviet space as follows:

> The tendency to conflate authoritarian crisis and democratic transition was powerfully reinforced by the demise of communism. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union generated a widespread perception that liberal democracy was 'the only game in town.' Because all roads lead to democracy, observers began to interpret all regime crises as incipient democratic transition.[3]

The exuberant optimism regarding the further spread of liberal democracy has been significantly dialed back in recent years and has given way to increasingly pessimistic viewpoints in light of the perceived stagnation of democratization around the world.[4] Recent world events have added to the pessimism, including the re-emergence and assertiveness of China, Iran, Russia and other regional authoritarian powers[5], Russia's annexation of Crimea and hybrid war in Ukraine's Don-

1 Fukuyama 1989: 3.
2 See: Huntington 1991.
3 Levitsky and Way 2015: 49.
4 As Francis Fukuyama points out, "there has been a democratic recession since 2006, with a decline in aggregate Freedom House scores every year since then" (Fukuyama 2015: 11).
5 Regarding the new assertiveness of authoritarian governments worldwide, Arch Puddington, the vice president of research at Freedom House, grimly notes: "Until recently, most authoritarian regimes claimed to respect international agreements and paid lip service to the norms of competitive elections and human rights. They now increa-

bass region, the descent of the "Arab Spring" into war and chaos, as well as protracted economic crises among the world's leading democratic powers.[6] Some observers have begun to speak of a democratic recession and rollback while others have even proclaimed the current era of democratic transition to have reached its end.[7] In stark contrast to his earlier positions, the darkening horizons of the current international system have also led Francis Fukuyama to question whether "we are experiencing a momentary setback in a general movement towards greater democracy around the world […] or whether the events of this year [2014] signal a broader shift in world politics and the rise of serious alternatives to democracy".[8]

1.2. The State of Democratization in CEE and the Post-Soviet Space

While post-communist states in CEE have largely transitioned in accordance with the initial optimistic predictions of democratization and transition scholars,[9] outcomes in the states that make up the former Soviet Union have taken divergent courses. Initial authoritarian openings led many observers in the early 1990s to see the beginnings of a transition to democracy. However, a more chaotic, liberal order turned out to be the *de facto* setting of many post-Soviet regimes coping with new challenges and unpredictable domestic and international environments, and in some cases civil war (Georgia and Tajikistan), interstate conflicts (Armenia and Azerbaijan) or armed separatism (Russia, Georgia, Moldova and Azerbaijan).

The competitive nature of Russian politics during this period is representative of much of the broader region. Russia's more liberal initial post-Soviet development was, in fact, due less to improved democratic performance and democracy taking root than the fact that President Boris Yeltsin "presided over a state in disarray, which left him unable to control his own security forces, bureaucracy, and regional governments".[10] According to Freedom House's annual survey *Freedom in the World,* five out of the seven (non-Baltic) post-Soviet states in Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus were hybrid regimes[11] at the onset of the 2000s, while Belarus and Azerbaijan were considered autocracies. At this point, improvements in democratic performances had failed to materialize in the region, in stark contrast to CEE.[12]

singly flout democratic values, argue for the superiority of what amounts to one-party rule, and seek to throw off the constraints of fundamental diplomatic principles" (Puddington 2015: 123).

6 Cf. Plattner 2014: 14.

7 See: Diamond 2008, Plattner 2014.

8 Fukuyama 2015: 11.

9 Serious concerns have been raised regarding democratic backsliding in CEE countries such as Hungary under the national conservative Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, as well as in Romania under former Prime Minister Victor Ponta (See: Müller 2013; Iusmen 2015).

10 Levitsky and Way 2015: 51.

11 Describing states which find themselves in the grey area between the ideal types of democracy and autocracy, Thomas Carothers writes that they exhibit "some attributes of democratic political life, including at least limited political space for opposition parties and independent civil society, as well as regular elections and democratic constitutions. Yet they suffer from serious democratic deficits" (Carothers 2002: 9).

12 The divergences in Europe's post-communist states were becoming strikingly evident throughout the 1990s. Com-

In the first half of the 2000s, a series of "Colored Revolutions" occurred in several post-Soviet states, namely Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005), and bolstered hopes of renewed movement towards democracy in the region. These events also led to a vigorous debate regarding the underlying causes of the mass mobilizations and their meaning for democratization in the region.[13] Some observers viewed these events as genuine democratic breakthroughs, while others interpreted them as a form of succession crisis among elites, typical to semi-authoritarian, hybrid regimes.[14] After the "Tulip Revolution" in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, no further colored revolutions took place in the post-Soviet space. The colored revolutions would end up having the inadvertent effect of unleashing an autocratic counter-reaction in the region among incumbent leaders wishing to prevent similar occurrences in their countries, along with the strengthening of Russia's renewed aspirations to regional hegemony.

For the post-Soviet states in Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus[15], the focus of this study, successes comparable to CEE or the Baltic States in terms of improved democratic performance and political and economic transformations would not be subsequently achieved. As Grzegorz Ekiert *et al.* point out, transitions away from autocracy in the region "have either lost their momentum and resulted in partially democratic systems or have been reversed and brought new authoritarian regimes".[16] The empirical data bears out this assessment. Over the period 1993-2014, Freedom House has measured improvements in political rights and civil liberties in just three post-Soviet countries, namely Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. These three states, however, have yet to breach the threshold of consolidated democracies and continue to occupy the "grey zone" between democracy and autocracy. Belarus and Russia, on the other hand, have gone in the opposite direction, regressing from hybrid regimes to increasingly authoritarian political systems, while Azerbaijan has maintained a hereditary autocracy throughout the entire period in question. Armenia has also seen deteriorations in both its political rights and civil liberties. What factors can account for the drastically differing outcomes regarding democratic performance and transition in CEE and the post-Soviet states on Europe's eastern periphery?

1.3. Research Question

In order to address this puzzle, this study will focus on developments in the post-Soviet states in Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus since gaining independence in the early 1990s. The

paring CEE to the FSU, Ekiert *et al. write that the new CEE EU member states had "introduced comprehensive reforms overhauling their states, economies, and welfare systems; they are wealthier with faster-growing economies and lower levels of income disparity; and they benefit from liberal democratic standards safeguarded by a consolidated democratic system" (Ekiert et al. 2007: 8f).*

13 See: Hale 2005; McFaul 2007; Way 2008; Stykow 2010.

14 Cf. Stykow 2010: 139-47.

15 The states to be considered here are: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in the Southern Caucasus, as well as Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova in Eastern Europe.

16 Ekiert *et al. 2007: 7.*

research question this study will investigate is as follows:

Why have some post-Soviet states in Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus achieved only modest gains in democratic performance since independence, while others have stagnated or undergone authoritarian regressions?

While pursuing the research question, the effects of both internal and external structural factors on the democratic performances of the above-mentioned post-Soviet states will be examined. The structural factors to be tested as independent variables include the effects of energy rents and rentierism on a respective country's democratic performance, as well as the role external actors - in this case, Russia - have played in shaping these post-Soviet countries' political trajectories through the instrumentalization of political, economic and military leverages and the exertion of outside pressure.

1.4. Relevance of the Research Question

With Russia's invasion and annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in March 2014, Europe witnessed the first forcible change to its borders since the end of the Second World War in 1945. The immediate underlying reasons for Russia's military interventions in Crimea and Donbas have to do with the EU's Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, Lithuania in November 2013. Then Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych (2010-2014) unexpectedly refused to sign an Association Agreement with the EU at the summit, opting for closer economic integration with Russia. This in turn sparked what would become known as the Euromaidan protests (2013-2014), which culminated in snipers killing more than 100 protestors in Kyiv[17] and Yanukovych fleeing his post first to eastern Ukraine and eventually to Russia in February 2014. Russia's military response followed shortly thereafter.

Considering this ongoing episode from a broader perspective, the underlying causes of the turmoil engulfing parts of Ukraine in the EU's eastern neighborhood (as well in its southern neighborhood) are connected to issues of good governance, or rather the lack thereof. Describing the Euromaidan protestors' motivation for taking to the streets to demonstrate following the Vilnius summit, Laure Delcour and Kataryna Wolczuk write the following:

> Even though very few protestors were actually familiar with the content of the Association Agreement, for them Europe symbolized democracy, human rights, and the rule of law – precisely the principles sorely lacking in Ukraine under Yanukovych. For the protestors, moving closer to Russia offered more of the same: deteriorating democratic standards and governance, suppression of the opposition, media, civil society, and corruption.[18]

17 Cf. RFE/RL 2015a: 'Ukraine marks anniversary of Maidan massacre' <http://www.rferl.org/content/ukraine-maidan-anniversary/26860006.html> (Accessed 02.05.2015).

18 Delcour and Wolczuk 2015: 471.

Francis Fukuyama, for his part, views the struggle for better governance in the post-Soviet region in terms of the conflict between modern forms of governance and neopatrimonial[19] political orders. In this sense, "the real choice facing the people in this region is […] whether their societies are to be based on governments seeking to serve the public interest in an impersonal manner, or are to be ruled by a corrupt coalition of elites who seek to use the state as a route to personal enrichment".[20] The EU's European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), developed prior to the union's eastern enlargements in 2004 and 2007, was designed to deal expressly with these issues of stability, good governance and increased integration in Europe's eastern and southern neighborhoods.[21] As the EU correctly recognized prior to enlargement, non-democratic governance, instability and armed conflicts in the union's eastern and southern peripheries represented not only threats to these regions themselves, but also to the EU and countries further afield. This was made evident with the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 on July 17, 2014 over occupied territory in eastern Ukraine. Among the 289 victims, 193 were Dutch citizens.[22] The proliferation of international terrorist organizations, armed conflicts, lawlessness and an unprecedented wave of migration from North Africa and the Middle East to Europe[23] also serve to illustrate the ultimate failures of non-democratic governance in Europe's southern neighborhood, along with its far-reaching consequences.

It is in this context that the importance of investigating both the internal and external structural factors which serve to diminish a country's democratic performance becomes most evident. Commenting on the advantages versus the disadvantages of democratic governance, Larry Diamond concludes that the open nature of democratic societies "logically make them much more likely than authoritarian regimes to honor their obligations under international law and treaties".[24] On the other hand, referring to the nature of authoritarian rule, Diamond quotes former United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and writes that the "dubious legitimacy of authoritarian regimes make them 'more likely to incite hostilities against other States in order to justify their suppression of internal dissent or forge a basis for national unity".[25] Indeed, some observers contribute Russia's ongoing war with Ukraine, as well as its increasingly belligerent stance towards

19 Fukuyama describes neopatrimonial political orders as states pretending "to be modern polities, but these in fact constitute rent-sharing kleptocracies run for the private benefit of the insiders" (Fukuyama 2015: 13).

20 Fukuyama 2015: 15.

21 In its 2004 strategy paper on the ENP, the European Commission writes: "The European Neighbourhood Policy's vision involves a ring of countries, sharing the EU's fundamental values and objectives, drawn into an increasingly close relationship, going beyond co-operation to involve a significant measure of economic and political integration. This will bring enormous gains to all involved in terms of increased stability, security and well being" (European Commission 2004: 5).

22 See: Coalson 2015: 'MH17 downing: One tragedy, one truth, but many stories', <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-ukraine-mh17-conspiracy-theories/27132875.html> (accessed 20.07.2015).

23 See: Kern (2015): 'Europe's great migration crisis' < http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/6146/europe-migration> (Accessed 20.07.2015).

24 Diamond 1999: 5.

25 Ibid.

the USA and the EU, to exactly these deficits in its increasingly authoritarian political regime.[26]

In addition to the significant real world implications of low democratic performance outlined above, this study's focus on cases where democratization has been only partially accomplished or where the progress made towards economic and political transitions has been completely reversed is relevant to obtaining a more nuanced understanding of the processes of democratization. Elaborating on this point, Thomas Ambrosio writes that "democratization theory tends to 'select on the dependent variable', in that it concentrates on successes rather than failures. In other words, the traditional focus has been on the positive progress of democracy, rather than those forces which strengthen or advance autocracy".[27] In this sense, this study can further the goal of obtaining a fuller picture of democratization processes and the forces which further progress towards more democratic governance, and those structural factors which ultimately hinder these processes from moving forward.

1.5. Methodology and Case Selection

The goal of this study is to investigate the internal and external structural factors which have influenced the democratic performance of post-Soviet states in both Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus. In this regard, a small-N, qualitative research design will be implemented using positivist methods. The positivist approach has its origins in the philosophy of science known as "logical positivism", which sees the methods employed by the natural sciences as the only legitimate way of carrying out scientific investigation.[28] As Allen Lee notes, "only by applying the methods of natural science, according to the positivist school of thought, will social science […] ever be able to match the achievements of natural science in explanation, prediction, and control".[29] Whether or not the same degree of maturity and sophistication achieved by the natural sciences can in fact be realized when dealing with the complex realities of social phenomena remains unclear.[30]

There are several important assumptions underlying the positivist approach to scientific investigation and the observer's relationship to empirical reality. Positivist ontology presupposes, for example, "the existence of a reality independent of the observer, consisting of law-like regularities", whereas its epistemology "claims the possibility of obtaining objective knowledge of the reality, focuses on the explanation of these regularities through the construction of theoretical general-

26 Analyzing Russian President Vladimir Putin's current foreign policy posture, the Russian political scientist Lilia Shevtsova writes: "What made Russia return to the role of the 'anti-West'? […] I would argue that this shift was preordained by Russia's failure to use its defeat in the Cold War to transform itself into a rule-of-law state […] The leader's turn toward provocation and war as expedients for survival tells us that the system has exhausted its stability-maintenance mechanisms" (Shevtsova 2015: 33f).

27 Ambrosio 2010: 376.

28 Cf. Lee 1991: 343.

29 Ibid.

30 Cf. Lee 1991: 343.

izations, and provides criteria for theory valuation".[31] Theories are regarded as general statements containing a causal law or hypothesis which explains the causes or effects of specific observable social phenomena, and the possibility for falsification must exist.[32] Hypotheses, for their part, lay out the causal relationships between specific phenomena in the form of independent and dependent variables, the latter being the caused phenomenon, while the former is the causing phenomenon.[33]

Employing this methodological approach, this study's research design will test two independent variables (IV) which have been drawn from the relevant theoretical research on democratization in the post-Soviet space. The case selection will take place on the side of the IVs. The two cases which show the greatest levels of variance will be selected in order to test the IVs effect on the dependent variable (DV), namely the respective country's democratic performance. For IV 1, *the amount of energy rents*, the cases Azerbaijan and Moldova have been selected. The cases Georgia and Azerbaijan have been chosen for IV2, *the degree of Russian external leverage*. For a more detailed description of the selected cases, section 4 below will offer an outline of this study's research design as well as the conceptualization and operationalization of the two independent variables and the study's case selection. The timeframe of this study will range from 1993 to 2014, in order to capture the respective country's political development since having gained independence.

1.6. Structure of the Thesis

The remainder of the study will consist of six chapters in total. As a starting point for this thesis, the following chapter will begin with a look at the key concepts of democracy and democratization. A definition and conceptualization of what democracy is will then be delineated, along with its embedding in the greater theoretical discussion of political transition, in general, and in the post-Soviet space, in particular. The conceptualization and the operationalization of the study's DV, democratic performance, will then be outlined. Chapter 3 will focus in on the study's theoretical underpinning. First, key terms to be used through the study will be defined. Second, an overview of the evolution of the scholarly debate of democratization will be outlined. Finally, the theoretical underpinning of the study's two IVs will be specified, along with key features and concepts of the arguments. In Chapter 4, the research design which serves as the foundation of this study will be presented and explained. This will include the conceptualization and operationalization of the study's two IVs, as well as the selection of the cases to be used in the empirical test of the study's hypotheses. The empirical test will then take place in Chapter 5. First, the empirical data for the dependent variable will be presented along with an overview of the democratic performance of the chosen cases. Next, the empirical data for the study's two IVs will be laid out. The results of

31 Kudenko 2000: 25
32 Cf. Van Era 1997: 7-12.
33 Cf. Ibid.

the empirical test will be summarized and analyzed in Chapter 6. In Chapter 7, the study will conclude with a brief overview of the results of the empirical test, along with a critical evaluation of the study's successes and shortcomings, along with prospects for future studies.

2. Democracy and its Measurement

This study's DV, namely *the degree of democratic performance*, has its theoretical basis in the academic discussions regarding political transition and regime change in the post-Cold War political environment. In the following sections, a precise definition of the basic building block of democratic performance, namely democracy at the nation state level, will be delineated. Once this has been accomplished, the conceptualization and operationalization of the DV will follow.

2.1. Democracy: What is it?

Whereas democracy as a form of governance can be traced back as far as ancient Greece, the more modern usage of the term came into being towards the end of the 18th century, in the context of the American and French Revolutions. Around the middle of the 20th century, democratic theorists were torn between two competing approaches – one was considered the "classical theory of democracy" and was primarily concerned with the sources and purposes (i.e. the will of the people and the common good, respectively) of democratic rule.[34] However, after the publication of Joseph Schumpeter's renowned study ***Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*** in 1943, a new compelling approach emerged and the theoretical focus shifted away from the maximalist and normative sources and purposes of democracy, towards a more minimalist procedural understanding of democratic governance. Schumpeter's new democratic method defined democracy as the "institutional arrangement for arriving at a political decision in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of competitive struggle for the people's vote".[35]

Schumpeter's minimalist definition of democracy and his primary focus on competitive elections was further developed and elaborated upon by Robert Dahl in his seminal 1971 publication ***Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition***. Dahl's conception of democracy, or polyarchy[36] as he puts it, consists of two overt dimensions, and one implied dimension, and is also in line with Schumpeter's procedural and minimalist approach to democratic governance. Polyarchy's two overt dimensions are opposition and participation, as the book's title suggests; opposition entails organized contestation through free, fair and regularly occurring elections, while participation consists of near universal adult suffrage and the ability to run for office. The third, implied, dimension is civil liberty, which, according to Larry Diamond, encompasses the "freedom to speak and publish dissenting views, freedom to form and join organizations, and alternative sources of information".[37] In this sense, Dahl successfully expands his conception of democracy beyond Schumpeter's parsimo-

34 Cf. Huntington 1991: 6.
35 Schumpeter 1943 (2003): 269.
36 Dahl defines polyarchy as "relatively (but incompletely) democratized regimes that have been substantially popularized, that is, highly inclusive and extensively open to public contestation" (Dahl 1971: 8).
37 Diamond 1999: 8.

nious focus on free and fair elections and incorporates important elements of civic democratic life.

In order for the three dimensions of polyarchy to be realized in a nation state with a large population, Dahl additionally specifies eight requirements which must exist:

1. Freedom to form and join organizations;
2. Freedom of expression;
3. Right to vote;
4. Eligibility for public office;
5. Rights of political leaders to compete for support;
6. Alternative source of information;
7. Free and fair elections;
8. Institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference.[38]

Commenting on Schumpeter's procedural foundation and Dahl's expansion thereof, Samuel Huntington points out the advantages of these two conceptions of democracy in that they "make it possible to judge to what extent political systems are democratic, to compare systems, and to analyze whether systems are becoming more or less democratic".[39]

The minimalist and procedural definitions of democracy laid out by Schumpeter and Dahl will serve as the basis for this study's conception of democracy. The "midrange"[40] definition offered by Levitsky and Way will be adopted, which is based on the consensus of a procedural approach to democracy and consists of four specific attributes, namely: (1) "free, fair, and competitive elections; (2) full adult suffrage; (3) broad protection of civil liberties, including freedom of speech, press, and association; and (4) the absence of nonelected 'tutelary' authorities (e.g., militaries, monarchies, or religious bodies) that limit elected officials' power to govern".[41] With this definition, Levitsky and Way have expanded upon Dahl's three dimensions by addressing the issue of reserved domains which can undermine the scope of action and the legitimacy exercised by democratically elected and legitimate political actors.

38 Dahl 1971: 3.

39 Huntington 1991: 7.

40 As Larry Diamond explains, a "midrange" conception of democracy distinguishes itself from a minimal definition based on the question as to whether "freedoms are relevant mainly to the extent that they ensure meaningful electoral competition and participation or whether they are, instead, viewed as necessary for a wider range of democratic functions" (Diamond 1999: 13).

41 Levitsky and Way 2010: 6.

2.2. Conceptualization of the DV – Democratic Performance

Now that a definition for democracy has been established, the next step will be to review how democracies themselves are classified into differing types and subtypes, as well as how democracy is measured. The relevant scholarly literature offers a myriad of competing definitions and conceptualizations of democracy. Ariel C. Armony and Hector E. Schamis have written of "a Babel in democratization studies".[42] Larry Diamond has noted that "so serious is the conceptual disarray that more than 550 subtypes of democracy are identified in David Collier and Steven Levitsky's review of some 150 (mostly recent) studies".[43]

When classifying different types and subtypes of democracies, Collier and Levitsky point to Giovanni Sartori and his "ladder of generality".[44] The ladder is "based on a pattern of inverse variation between the number of defining attributes and number of cases. Thus, concepts with *fewer* attributes commonly apply to *more* cases and are therefore higher on the ladder of generality, whereas concepts with *more* defining attributes apply to *fewer* cases and hence are lower on the ladder".[45] In this sense, moving down the ladder of generality when dealing with the root concept of democracy can lead to a more precise understanding of different types of democracy as well as greater differentiation. The increased conceptual differentiation provides "the more fine-grained distinctions that for some purposes are invaluable to the researcher".[46] However, if a subtype of democracy created by moving down the ladder of generality is not fully a democracy, this can lead to conceptual stretching[47] and may not be appropriate. One solution to this problem is the creation of diminished subtypes, such as "delegative" or "illiberal" democracy.

An example of such conceptual differentiation when dealing with the root concept of democracy is the distinction made between a liberal democracy and an electoral democracy. The concept of an electoral democracy is based upon the minimalist understanding of democracy, which is, to a certain extent, conflated with the holding of elections. As Larry Diamond comments, an electoral democracy is "a civilian, constitutional system in which the legislative and chief executive offices are filled through regular, competitive, multiparty elections with universal suffrage".[48] Such definitions, however, neglect vital factors which are fundamental to the functioning of a democratic state, such as civil liberties, for example. Phillip C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl refer to this understanding of democracy as the "electoral fallacy" and comment that "however central to democracy, elections occur intermittently and only allow citizens to choose between the highly aggregated alternatives offered by political parties, which can, especially in the early stages of a dem-

42 See Armony and Schamis 2005.
43 Diamond 1999: 7.
44 See: Sartori 1970.
45 Collier and Levitsky 1997: 434.
46 Ibid. 435.
47 Conceptual stretching is referred to as "the distortion which occurs when a concept does not fit the new cases" (Collier and Mahon, Jr. 1993: 845).
48 Diamond 1999: 10.

ocratic transition, proliferate in a bewildering variety".[49] Wolfgang Merkel has been equally critical of the concept of electoral democracy and minimalist definitions in general. According to Merkel, this particular conceptualization is responsible for overly optimistic application of democracy to regimes not deserving of the label after the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, "the optimism of transition analyses in the political science activities of these years was also, above all, an artefact of the conceptual minimalization of democracy, the neglect of structural impediments, and a voluntarization of the political agency to shape historical events and trajectories".[50]

There is also a certain degree of conceptual ambiguity as to where, for example, an electoral democracy ends and an "electoral" or "competitive" authoritarian regime begins.[51] Several different strategies have been developed to attempt to reconcile the conceptual difficulties around hybrid regimes, which fall somewhere between liberal democracy and authoritarianism. These range from referring to hybrid regimes as diminished forms of democracy, such as Diamond's concept of electoral democracy, to developing diminished subtypes of authoritarianism, such as Levitsky and Ways concept of competitive authoritarianism.[52] Freedom House, on the other hand, has opted to employ the term "partly free" to cover such political systems.

In contrast to the diminished subtype of electoral democracy, a liberal democracy is one that is more expansive and differentiated than its minimalist counterpart, and is more in line with the conceptualizations offered by Dahl and Levitsky and Way. Liberal democracy's conceptualization incorporates, for example, the rule of law, the absence of reserved domains, vertical and horizontal accountability for office holders as well as civil and political pluralism for individuals and groups.[53] In its annual survey *Freedom in the World*, FH makes a similar distinction between an electoral democracy and a liberal democracy. Regarding its methodology, FH notes that its "term 'electoral democracy' differs from 'liberal democracy' in that the latter also implies the presence of a substantial array of civil liberties. In *Freedom in the World*, all *Free* countries can be considered both electoral and liberal democracies, while some *Partly Free* countries qualify as electoral, but not liberal, democracies."[54]

In order to measure the democratic performance of a particular post-Soviet country, this study will base its evaluations primarily on the rating system employed by FH in its *Freedom in the World* survey. FH's conceptualization of a liberal democracy will serve as this study's benchmark for a high

49 Schmitter and Karl 1991: 78.

50 Merkel 2010: 19f.

51 In this regard, Collier and Levitsky comment that "diminished subtypes are useful for characterizing hybrid regimes, but they raise the issue of whether these regimes should in fact be treated as subtypes of democracy, rather than subtypes of authoritarianism or some other concept" (Collier and Levitsky 1997: 450).

52 Broadly describing the differences between full authoritarian, democratic and competitive authoritarian regimes, Levitsky and Way explain that "whereas full authoritarian regimes are characterized by the absence of competition (and, hence, of uncertainty) and democracy is characterized by fair competition, competitive authoritarianism is marked by competition that is real but unfair [….] Yet such unfairness does not preclude serious contestation – or even occasional opposition victories" (Levitsky and Way 2010: 12).

53 Cf. Diamond 1999: 10f.

54 Freedom House 2015b: 3.

level of democratic performance, as it is consistent with the criteria laid out by Levitsky and Way's mid-range definition of democracy. This is made clear by the survey's two areas of focus, namely political rights and civil liberties. A more detailed description of the DV's operationalization will be presented in section 2.3 below.

2.3. Operationalization of the DV – Democratic Performance

The operationalization of the DV will be based upon the variable's mid-range definition as well as the conceptualization of a liberal democracy outlined in the previous two sections. As mentioned above, the assessment of a country's democratic performance will be based upon a country's average of their "political rights" and "civil liberties" ratings from FH's *Freedom in the World* survey.

FH is an American NGO and was founded in 1941 in Washington, D.C., USA. FH describes itself on its website as "an independent watchdog organization dedicated to the expansion of freedom around the world".[55] FH's annual *Freedom in the World* survey began in the 1950s as the *Balance Sheet of Freedom*. Over the course of the ensuing decades, it continued to develop in terms of both scope as well as methodological sophistication and made its first appearance in book form as *Freedom in the World* in 1978. FH offers data for "political rights" and "civil liberties" dating back to 1972. Regarding FH's relationship with the United States Government (USG), *The Economist* writes that FH does not "conceal its financial ties to the American government, which supplies 80% of its income. But it strongly denies that it acts as an arm of the government, or that it holds back from criticizing America and its friends".[56]

Indicators for DV:

- "Political rights" and "civil liberties" from FH's *Freedom in the World Survey*

Freedom in the World's rating system is based on a three-tiered approach, consisting of scores, ratings and statuses. The indicator "political rights" (PR) consists of ten different sub-indicators which are grouped into four different subcategories, namely: electoral process, political pluralism and participation, and the functioning of government. "Civil liberties" (CL) consists of 15 separate sub-indicators, grouped into four subcategories: freedom of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, rule of law and personal autonomy and individual rights. PR can be awarded a total of 40 points, while CL can be given up to 60, leaving 100 points as the best possible score a particular country or territory can receive. Regarding changes in a particular country's score form year to year, FH notes that "the scores from the previous edition are used as a benchmark for the current year under review. A score is typically changed only if there has been a real-world development during the year that warrants a decline or improvement (e.g., a crackdown on the media,

55 Freedom House (2015d): 'About US' <https://freedomhouse.org/about-us#.VZ3JOvntmko> (Accessed 09.07.2015).
56 The Economist 2008: 'When freedom stumbles' <http://www.economist.com/node/10534384> (Accessed 09.07.2015).

the country's first free and fair elections)".[57]

After the score has been established, both PR and CL are assigned a rating based on the country's total score. The ratings rank from "1" to "7", with "1" being the best possible score and "7" being the worst, i.e. no political rights or civil liberties, respectively. The scores and the ratings are broken down below in Tables 1 and 2:

Table 1: Political Rights

Political Rights (PR)	
Total Scores	PR Rating
36-40	**1**
30-35	**2**
24-29	**3**
18-23	**4**
12-17	**5**
6-11	**6**
0-5	**7**

Table 2: Civil Liberties

Civil Liberties (CL)	
Total Scores	CL Rating
53-60	**1**
44-52	**2**
35-43	**3**
26-34	**4**
17-25	**5**
8-16	**6**
0-7	**7**

Source: Freedom House (2015b): 15

In order to determine a country's status for a particular year, the PR and CL ratings are averaged together to come up with a combined rating. The status ranges from "1", which is considered "free", to "7", categorized as "not free". For clarity and a more intuitive depiction of a country's democratic performance, FH's status scale will be reversed, so that a lower score will represent a lower democratic performance, and vice versa. The exact breakdown of the country's assigned status is depicted below in Table 3.

Table 3: Democracy Rating and Status

Combined Average of the PR and CL Ratings	Freedom Status
5.5-7.0	**Free**
3.0-5.0	**Partly Free**
1.0-2.5	**Not Free**

Source: Freedom House (2015b): 16

57 Freedom House 2015b: 3.

According to Larry Diamond, "the 'free' rating of the Freedom House survey is the best available empirical indicator of liberal democracy".[58] Diamond goes on to further elaborate on the tangible differences between the ratings "free" and "partly free". Pertaining to the difference between a 5.0 and 5.5 rating in PR, which is the cutoff point between a liberal and an electoral democracy, Diamond notes that "a [5.0] indicates significantly more military influence in politics, electoral and political violence, or electoral irregularities – and thus political contestation that is far appreciably less free, fair, inclusive, and meaningful".[59] Similar distinctions are also discernable in the CL ratings. Though establishing cutoff points between conceptual distinctions is always a more or less arbitrary undertaking, given the nuanced differentiation present in FH's rating system, it will serves as a useful measure of the democratic performance of post-Soviet states in this study.

In the following section, the study's theoretical basis will be presented. The distinctions between the terms "transformation" and "transition" will be presented, along with a definition of democratization and other key terms. After these terms have been clarified, an overview of the scholarly debate on democratization processes will be laid out, along with a summary of the current state of research on democratization in the post-Soviet space. It is from this theoretical basis that the study's two IVs will be derived. Finally, the theoretical basis of IV 1 and IV 2 will be explored.

58 Diamond 1999: 12.
59 Ibid. 12f.

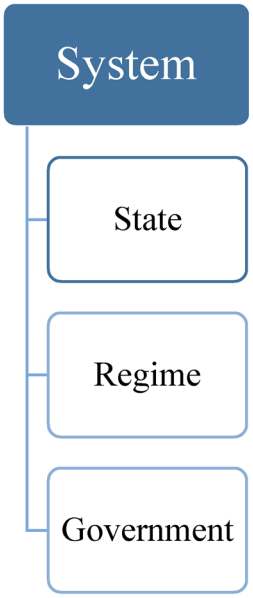
3. Theoretical Basis: Transition and Democratization in the Post-Soviet Space

In their seminal 1986 work ***Transitions from Authoritarian Rule***, Guillermo O'Donnell and Phillipe C. Schmitter observe the following regarding a common obstacle confronting all who undertake scientific investigation: "one major difficulty confronting our collective effort [is] to create a common language for inquiry among scholars rather heterogeneous background".[60] In this sense, the following section will establish definitions for terms which will be used throughout the remainder of this work, including regime, transition and democratization.

3.1. Defining Key Terms: Regime, Transition and Democratization

When examining questions of transition, it is important to specify the level the transition is taking place on. Drawing upon Robert Fishman's article 'Rethinking state and regime'[61], Wolfgang Merkel identifies four distinct levels of political organization which need to be considered, namely: the levels of system, state, regime and government.[62]

Figure 1: Levels of Political Organization



Commenting on the importance of understanding the level of political change that is taking place in a situation of democratization, Robert Fishman states that particular level "is important for not only identifying the source of the democratic initiative, but also for understanding the sub-

60 O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 6.
61 See: Fishman 1990.
62 Cf. Merkel 1999: 70-4.

sequent trajectory of political change".[63] As Figure 1 illustrates, the level of system is the highest level and the remaining three levels, regime, state and government, are contained within it. The system level consists of at least four different subsystems, namely politics, economics, society and culture.[64] As Wolfgang Merkel notes, whereas political transition processes in Latin America and Southern Europe took place primarily at the political level, transition in CEE took place, and are still taking place, contemporaneously at the political, economic levels, as well as at the societal levels, in terms of mentalities.[65]

More important for this study is the level of regime. The regime level can be thought of as "the formal and informal organization of the center of political power, and of its relations with the broader society. A regime determines who has access to political power, and how those who are in power deal with those who are not".[66] If a regime type becomes institutionalized, and its relevant patterns are "habitually known, practiced and accepted"[67] by the relevant actors, the regime will experience certain degree of durability and permanence which extends beyond particular governments. It is these patterns which are then categorized as belonging to a democratic, hybrid, authoritarian or even totalitarian regime type. Changes in a country's political regime can lead to transitions both towards and away from democracy, as well as transitions towards and away from authoritarianism.

The state, on the other hand, is typically a more permanent structure than a regime. Fishman characterizes the state as a structure of "domination and coordination including a coercive apparatus and the means to administer a society and extract resources from it".[68] Lastly, the government is the least permanent level of political organization. Changes in government are a normal part of democratic politics. In new democracies, however, changes in governments serve as a measure of the country's democratic consolidation and the political elites' commitment to observing democratic governance and practices. Commenting on the significance of a country's second governmental turnover and the location of the governmental level under the regime level, Samuel Huntington notes that it shows "both elites and publics are operating within the democratic system; when things go wrong, you change the rulers, not the regime".[69]

Having delineated what a political regime is and the difference between it and other levels of political organization, definitions for both transition and transformation will now be enunciated. In their influential work ***Transitions from Autocracy***, O'Donnell and Schmitter developed a concise and parsimonious definition of a transition. They refer to transitions simply as "the interval between one political regime and another".[70] While the most common usage of the term has been

63 Fishman 1990: 432.
64 Cf. Merkel 1999: 73.
65 Cf. Merkel 1999: 73.
66 Fishman 1990: 428.
67 O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 73.
68 Fishman 1990: 428.
69 Huntington 1991: 267.
70 O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 6.

in the context of a country transitioning from an authoritarian to a democratic regime[71], O'Donnell and Schmitter recognize that transitions can progress towards or away from democracy and democratic gains can either be consolidated or reversed. The term transformation, on the other hand, is much broader than the term transition, and is positioned at the system level. It does not possess a specific meaning, per se, but is used rather more generically as an umbrella term for all possible variations of political transition, at all levels.[72]

The final concept to be defined in this section is democratization. Reduced to its most basic components, democratization simply refers to the transition from a non-democratic regime to a democratic regime. In more specific terms laid out by O'Donnell and Schmitter, democratization is "the processes whereby the rules and procedures of citizenship are either applied to political institutions previously governed by other principles […], or expanded to include persons not previously enjoying such rights and obligations […], or extended to cover issues and institutions not previously subject to citizen participation […]".[73] Democratization is usually initiated in non-democratic regimes by way of a process of liberalization, whereby rights are redefined and extended.[74] It is concluded when democracy has been sufficiently institutionalized and consolidated in a particular country. In the following section, an overview of the scholarly debate of democratization will be presented, along with a summary of current research. It is from this theoretical debate that the study's IVs will be drawn from.

3.2. An Overview of the Scholarly Debate on Democratization

Commenting on the complexity of transition situations, which are fraught with difficulties, dangers and setbacks, Adam Przeworski aptly observes in his 1991 study ***Democracy and the Market*** the following:

> The strategic problem of transition is to get to democracy without being either killed by those who have arms or starved by those who control productive resources. As this very formulation suggests, the path to democracy is mined […] In most countries where democracy has been established, it has turned out to be fragile. And in some countries, transitions have gotten stuck.[75]

This has been most evident in the post-Soviet space, where the breakdown of the Soviet Union has led to outcomes that have ranged from consolidated democracies, to hybrid regimes and (re)consolidated autocracies. Naturally, the question arises as to what can account for the variati-

71 Cf. Merkel 1999: 75.
72 Cf. Ibid. 76.
73 O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 8.
74 Cf. Ibid. 7.
75 Przeworski 1991: 37.

on in outcomes to situations of regime breakdown and political and economic transition. Social scientists have been grappling with this question since at least the 19th century. Karl Marx (1818-1883), inspired by Hegel, is attributed with having developed the first coherent model of political, economic and social development and transformation.[76] His work was further developed by the German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) as well as Joseph Alois Schumpeter (1883-1950). The term "transformation" was used for the first time by Karl Polyani (1886-1964) in his 1944 work ***The Great Transformation***. Polyani saw the failure of the liberal market economy with the onset of the Great Depression in 1929 as an engine of transformation which led to the appearance of Soviet Communism, fascism and the New Deal on the world stage.[77]

3.2.1. Early Structuralist Approaches: Modernization Theory

One very important attempt to explain why certain countries have developed into democratic political systems while others failed, was what came to be known as modernization theory. This approach emerged around the end of the 1950s and remained dominant into the 1970s. One of its key theoreticians was the American political sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset (1922-2006). In numerous studies, Lipset sought to provide evidence for a correlation between a country's economic development and other social requisites and its level of democratization. As Lipset simply puts it, "concretely, this means that the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy".[78] In this sense, modernization theory took on a rather deterministic outlook on the development of democracy, where by its attainment was simply the final step in a universally valid process of modernization. Critiquing these deterministic aspects of modernization theory and its neglect of agency, Adam Przeworski writes that "the method characteristic of this approach is to associate inductively outcomes, such as democracy or fascism, with initial conditions […]. In this formulation the outcome is uniquely determined by conditions, and history goes on without anyone ever doing anything".[79]

3.2.2. The Transition School of Democratization: Actor-Centered Approaches

Another critic of modernization theory was the German-American political scientist Dankwart Rustow (1924-1996), considered the father of transitology. His 1970 article 'Transitions to democracy' lead to a paradigm shift in how political scientists approached the question of political transition and democratization, placing a greater emphasis on the role of actors. Rustow attempted to create a "genetic theory" of democratization, explaining how democracy comes about and how

76 Cf. Kollmorgen, Merkel and Wagener 2015: 12.
77 Cf. Ibid. 14.
78 Lipset 1959: 75.
79 Przeworski 1991: 96.

it thrives. In contrast to several aspects of modernization theory, Rustow assumed that transition to democracy need not be "a world-wide uniform process, that it always involves the same social classes, the types of political issues, or even the same methods of solution".[80] In his model, the only precondition, or "background condition", for democratization to begin to take place was what he termed "national unity". National unity, as Rustow puts it, implies that the "vast majority of citizens in a democracy-to-be must have no doubt or mental reservations as to which political community they belong to".[81] Three further phases are presented in Rustow's model, including an entrenched and serious unresolved conflict, an attempt at reaching a compromise through the introduction of democratic rules, and lastly, the public and political classes becoming habituated with these new rules.

Rustow's actor-centered model would come to serve as the theoretical foundation for Guillermo O'Donnell, Phillipe C. Schmitter and Laurence Whitehead's several volume study entitled ***Transitions from Authoritarian Rule***, which appeared in the late 1980s. Adam Przeworski's 1991 work ***Democracy and the Market*** would also prove to be very influential in this context. These sets of studies would come to dominate the debate on transitions in political science for at least a decade, and would contribute to the widespread usage of the term "transition", as opposed to "transformation".[82] They also shifted their focus to the micro level analysis of elite interactions with actors from civil society. O'Donnell and Schmitter's model of transition is more descriptive and empirical in nature and focuses on a changing constellation of actors in processes of democratization. Transition situations, according to O'Donnell and Schmitter, hinge upon the opening of authoritarian regimes and their fracturing into two separate camps, namely hardliners and soft-liners. The soft-liners then proceed to form a negotiated pact with parts of the opposition in order to eventually carry out democratic reforms.[83] Przeworski, on the other hand, injects rational choice theory into his analysis of regime openings and democratization. His approach is modeled using game theory at each strategic level on the path from liberalization to possible democratization.[84]

80 Rustow 1970: 345.
81 Ibid. 358.
82 Cf. Kollmorgen, Merkel and Wagener 2015: 15f.
83 Cf. Brückner 2015: 93.
84 Cf. Ibid. 94.

3.2.3. Beyond the Transition Paradigm: The Grey Area and Authoritarian Diffusion and Promotion

In the 2000s, the transition paradigm[85] would come under scrutiny and critique as it became increasingly clear that a large number of countries considered "transition countries" were not following the transition model outlined above. Describing the political trajectory of many of the countries labeled transition countries by transitologists, Thomas Carothers claims that "most of the 'transitional countries', however, are neither dictatorial nor clearly headed toward democracy. They have entered a political gray zone. They have some attributes of democratic political life […], yet they suffer from serious democratic deficits".[86] Echoing Carothers' criticism, Russian political scientist Vladimir Gel'man urges researches of democratization to move beyond the overly simplistic understanding of the transition paradigm and its application to post-Soviet countries and to adopt a more realistic research agenda. He notes in his 2002 article 'Post-Soviet transitions and democratization: Towards theory-building' that it is necessary for researchers to "go beyond those 'transition' and 'consolidation' studies that resemble the paradigm of a Hollywood film. According to that paradigm, 'good guys' (this is, democrats) are confronted by 'bad guys' (anti-democrats) and invariably the film has a happy ending (the victory of the 'good guys')".[87]

With their 2010 publication ***Competitive Authoritarianism***, Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way sought to take on such a research agenda. In their approach, Levitsky and Way focus on countries stuck in the grey zone between authoritarianism and democracy. Instead of viewing them as countries which had failed to democratize, they instead treat them as a distinct category, namely competitive authoritarian regimes. As Levitsky and Way put it, "rather than 'partial', 'incomplete', or 'unconsolidated democracies, these cases should be conceptualized for what they are: a distinct, nondemocratic regime type. Instead of assuming that such regimes are in transition to democracy, it is more useful to ask why some democratized and others did not".[88] Investigating why hybrid regimes succeeded or failed in democratizing, Levitsky and Way reintroduce structural factors into their analysis. These factors, which serve as the explanatory variables, include ties to the West, which they conceptualize as links and leverages[89], as well as the strength of the governing-party

85 In his 2002 article 'The end of the transition paradigm', Thomas Carothers lays out five underlying assumptions of the transition paradigm. These assumptions are as follows: 1. If a country is moving away from authoritarianism, it can also be considered to be moving toward democracy; 2. Transition situations unfold in a particular succession of stages; 3. Elections are believed to possess a deterministic quality in the process of democratization and the continued holding of elections will deepen the transition to democracy; 4. The rejection of structural explanations in accounting for the onset of the democratization processes; 5. The transitions to democracy taking place within the third wave of democratization are happening in functioning and coherently constructing countries (Cf. Carothers 2002: 6-8).

86 Ibid. 9.

87 Gel'man 2002: 100.

88 Levitsky and Way 2010: 4.

89 Levitsky and Way describe leverages as a "government's vulnerability to external democratizing pressure" (Ibid. 40), while linkages are considered the "cross-border flows (of capital, goods and services, people and information) among particular countries and the United States, the EU […] and Western-dominated multilateral institutions" (Ibid. 43).

and the organizations of a particular country.[90] The authors view linkages with the West as being key to understanding which competitive authoritarian regimes were successful in democratizing, while geographical proximity to the West is considered the most important source of linkages.[91] However, Levitsky and Way's approach has received criticism on exactly this point. As Ghia Nodia points out, geographical proximity seems an intuitive explanation to successful democratization, however "there are glaring exceptions as well. Alyaksandr Lukashenka's Belarus shares borders with three NATO and EU member states (Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland), yet is has justly been called 'Europe's last dictatorship' and a 'Stalinist Jurassic Park'".[92]

In more recent studies on democratization and regime transition, especially in the post-Soviet space, some observers have begun focusing on factors which hinder democratization processes from taking place and democratic gains from being consolidated. In this analysis, the international dimension of authoritarianism and its influence on non-democratic rule has come to play a central explanatory role. Referring to the gaps in transition literature, Julia Bader *et al*. note the following:

> What has not yet been the subject of extensive research, however, is the role played by outside powers in helping to bring about, or stabilise, non-democratic rule. Some observers, though, have begun to associate the finding of stagnant democratisation with the phenomenon of newly emerging non-democratic powers within a changing world order, and most prominently of China and Russia.[93]

One body of research which has undertaken this approach has focused on what is termed authoritarian diffusion.[94] In the context of transitions in the post-Soviet space, diffusion was initially employed to explain democratic transition in the region. One such study was conducted by Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik.[95] The authors sought to link two waves of mass mobilizations in CEE to diffusion dynamics.[96] The first of these two popular mobilizations occurred between 1987 and 1990, which precipitated the collapse of the communist bloc, and again between 1996 and 2005, during the wave of colored revolutions in CEE. Researchers of authoritarian diffusion, on the other hand, are more interested in explaining the staying power of non-democratic regimes and what some perceive as a reverse wave of democratization.[97]

90 Cf. Ibid. 5.
91 Cf. Ibid. 44.
92 Nodia 2014: 144.
93 Bader *et al. 2010: 84.*
94 Some examples include: Gel'man and Lankina 2008; Ambrosio 2010; Burnell and Schlumberger 2010; Bader 2014.
95 See: Bunce and Wolchik 2010.
96 Bunce and Wolchik describe diffusion as always involving "a conscious decision by local actors, sometimes in collaboration with international allies, to copy innovations introduce by actors in other contexts – a decision that flows from their values and interests that takes into account expanded opportunities, incentives, and capacity for change" (Ibid. 34).
97 Cf. Erdmann *et al. 2013: 4.*

A further approach which falls into this category is the body of research which has been conducted on autocracy promotion.[98] Much like authoritarian diffusion was based on the diffusion of democratic practices, autocracy promotion has its theoretical origins in the scholarly literature on Western democracy promotion. Whereas there is a relatively comprehensive body of studies on external actors and democratization, and increasingly pertaining to hybrid regimes, Nicole Jackson notes that "there is little, if any, that explicitly theorizes or explains the process of 'autocratization' […] In particular, there is little written that explores the role of external factors and whether and how they influence regimes to maintain status quo, or 'upgrade' or strengthen authoritarian elements in their political systems".[99] Compared to authoritarian diffusion, autocracy promotion is based on the premise that the external influence exerted on foreign countries is a conscious decision on the part of the authoritarian country doing the influencing. This is due in part to the desire of an authoritarian regime to not only strengthen its own internal position, but to also shore up its position in its own neighborhood, in order to be able to maximize its own influence, all the while attempting to minimize the influence of external powers, such as the USA or the EU.[100] A more in depth analysis of the theoretical foundation of autocracy promotion will be presented below in section 3.3.

3.2.4. Rentier Theory Approach

In addition to the theoretical approaches to democratization and transition presented above, a brief overview of one final theory will be presented, namely the rentier state theory approach. The rentier state theory has its origins in the literature on political economy and democratization. Broken down to their most simple constitute parts, political economic approaches are primarily concerned with investigating the interaction between economics and politics. The rentier state theory itself was originally developed by Hossein Mahdavy in the context of pre-revolutionary Iran, however in subsequent studies, this approach has also been applied to countries in the post-Soviet space to investigate the effects of rentierism on democratization and governance.[101] A rent is considered "the difference between the value of production at world prices and the total costs of production"[102], while a rentier state is one in which the economy is dominated by such rents. The sources of the rents can range from the sale of natural point resources such as natural gas or oil, to the transit of such resources through pipelines or subsidies from foreign governments or foreign grants.[103] Rentierism has a negative effect on country's democratic performance, in so far as

98 Examples of such studies include: Tolstrup 2009; Bader *et al. 2010; Jackson 2010; Burnell 2010; Vanderhill 2013.*
99 Jackson 2010: 103.
100 Cf. Tolstrup 2009: 925.
101 See: Grzymala-Busse 2008; Franke, Gawrich and Alakbarov 2009, 2011; Meissner 2010a; Götz 2011; Balmaceda 2013; Shaw 2013.
102 The World Bank (2015): 'Oil rents (as % of GDP)' < http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PETR.RT.ZS> (Accessed 20.04.2015).
103 Cf. Franke, Gawrich and Alakbarov 2009: 11.

the income and distribution of the rents reduce a government's need to tax its citizens and address their needs, while the windfall profits can also be used to shore up the position of governing elites in terms of both military and security spending, as well as the construction of patronage networks. As a result of this, "state institutions are weakened and the rents are not utilized to guarantee long-term, sustainable socioeconomic development".[104] A more in depth presentation of the rentier state theory will be presented below in section 3.3.

3.3. The Theoretical Basis of the IVs

Drawing from the relevant scholarly debate on democratization outlined above, this study's two IVs will be drawn from the rentier state approach as well as the literature focusing on the recent debate surrounding the promotion of autocracy by external actors. The rentier state theory has been applied primarily to post-Soviet countries rich in natural resources, such as Azerbaijan, Russia and Kazakhstan. However, post-Soviet countries poor in their own natural resources, such as Belarus and Ukraine, but which benefit from the rents associated with the transport of point resources from Russia westwards, have recently also been studied in this context, but primarily in regards to energy dependency.[105] This study wants to therefore look at the effects of rents on democratic performance post-Soviet states which are both poor and rich in energy resources. With regards to the second IV, this study would like to contribute the growing body of literature on external actors and autocracy promotion in the post-Soviet space.

3.3.1. The Theoretical Basis of IV 1: The Amount of Energy Rents

The theoretical underpinning of IV 1 is the rentier state theory. With his 1970 article 'The pattern and problems with economic development in rentier states', the economist Hossein Mahdavy was the first to postulate the theory of a rentier state. In the 1950s and 1960s, it had been assumed that natural resource wealth could allow a developing country to catch up with the developed countries.[106] However, this approach was eventually refuted due to contradictory empirical evidence. In his article, Mahdavy described a rentier state as one which regularly receives substantial external rents, with rents being sums of money paid to certain individuals, companies or governments by foreign individuals, companies or governments.[107] Regarding the disproportional relationship between investments and gains in energy-rich rentier states, Mahdavy writes that "the input requirements of the oil industry from the local economies [...] is so insignificant, that for all practical purposes one can consider the oil revenues almost as a free gift of nature or as a grant from for-

104 Meissner 2010a: 10.
105 See: Balmaceda 2011, 2013.
106 This theory was referred to as the 'staple theory of economic growth' (Cf. Meissner 2010a: 9; Rosser 2006: 7).
107 Cf. Mahdavy 1970: 428.

eign sources".[108] Hazem Beblawi further expanded upon Mahdavy's definition of rentier state, adding further defining characteristics and differentiating between a rentier state and a rentier economy.[109] Those receiving the external rents are generally considered an autonomous social group, which is characterized by a so-called "rentier mentality".[110]

The rentier state theory is generally subordinated to the literature on the "resource curse".[111] Contrary to early studies mentioned above, since the late 1980s, a consensus has been established that the abundance of particular natural resources can be harmful to a country's development. This consensus, according to Andrew Rosser, contends that this abundance "increases the likelihood that countries will experience negative economic, political and social outcomes including poor economic performance, low levels of democracy, and civil war".[112] Furthermore, this consensus has become so influential, that "the idea that natural resources are bad for development is now widely accepted by researchers and officials at the major international financial institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund".[113]

Economic explanations for the negative impact of natural resource wealth on a country's development have focused on the so-called "Dutch Disease" as well as poor economic linkages between economic sectors engaged in natural resource extraction and non-energy based sectors, such as agriculture or manufacturing. The former describes a causal mechanism, whereby the extraction and export of natural resources causes a country's real exchange rate and currency to appreciate. This in turn reduces the competitiveness of non-energy related sections of the economy. The booming energy sector further attracts labor and capital, thus increasing the production costs of other economic sectors. In this context, "the export of agricultural and manufactured goods declines and the costs of the goods and services that cannot be imported inflate. The vicious cycle culminates in an overall macroeconomic crisis".[114] The latter outlines a further economic scenario, whereby a boom in commodities exports has little effect on non-export sectors. In the end, certain sectors of the economy continue to boom, while unaffiliated sectors remain backwards and underdeveloped.[115]

Other research has attempted to explain the underlying political causal mechanisms responsible

108 Ibid. 429.

109 Beblawi developed four specific characteristics of a rentier state, namely: 1. Rent situations dominate the country's economy; 2. The country's economy relies on a substantial external rent; 3. Few are engaged in the generation of the rent wealth, while a majority take part in its distribution; 4. In a rentier state, the government is the primary recipient of the external rents (Cf. Beblawi 1990: 51f).

110 On the differences between the common economic mentality and the rentier mentality, Beblawi writes that the latter "embodies a break in the work-reward causation. Reward – income or wealth – is not related to work and risk bearing, rather to chance or situation. For a rentier, reward becomes a windfall gain […] against the conventional outlook where reward is integrated in a process as the end result of a long, systematic and organized production circuit" (Ibid. 52).

111 Cf. Meissner 2010a: 9.

112 Rosser 2006: 7.

113 Ibid.

114 Meissner 2010a: 10.

115 Cf. Ibid. 9.

for the negative effects of rentierism on democratic performance. In his influential article "Does oil hinder democracy?' from 2001, Michael Ross approaches rentierism from a primarily political/ state-centered perspective. He develops three distinct causal mechanisms responsible for the detrimental effects of energy rents on democracy, which he refers to as a "rentier effect", a "suppression effect" and a "modernization effect". The "rentier effect" affects how a country carries out its taxation policy. Windfall profits due to rents from the energy sector decrease a government's need to tax its population and this in turn leads to gaps in accountability between those who govern and those who are governed. Regarding the historical and political rational behind the "rentier effect", Ross observes that "historians and political scientists have argued that the demand for representation in government arose in response to the sovereign's attempt to raise taxes".[116] In such a situation, a government obtains the support of its population not by taxation and representation, but rather through the distribution of allocation of rents.[117] In this way, energy rents enable governments to "buy support" through patronage networks and clientelist relationships, which serves to increase society's dependence on the government and its financial allocations and distort class structures.[118]

A further causal mechanism conceptualized by Ross is the "suppression effect". The "suppression effect" refers to a process whereby government elites are able to use energy rents in a discretionary manner to bolster the government's security forces and apparatus. This in turn increases its ability to effectively clamp down on any dissent that may occur, further cementing the government's hold on power and access to energy rents. Regarding the political desires of citizens in a rentier state, Michael Ross observes that "citizens in resource-rich states may want democracy as citizens elsewhere, but resource wealth may allow their governments to spend more on internal security and so block the population's democratic aspirations".[119]

The final causal mechanism developed by Ross is the "modernization effect", which is a social mechanism based on modernization theory. It claims that the two most important social developments for facilitating democracy are rising education levels amongst the citizenry as well as increasing work specialization, which allows for more independent thought and action as well as a stronger bargaining power with elites, due to their specialized skills.[120] If rent wealth does not lead to increases in education levels and occupational specialization, it is assumed that it also will not lead to democratization.

One final approach to the effects of rentierism on democratic performance are those put forth in the state-centered political economy literature on the topic. The political economy approach includes institutions in its analysis of the effects of resource rents on the democratic performance

116 Ross 2001: 332f.
117 See: Luciani 1990b.
118 Cf. Herb 2005: 298.
119 Ross 2001: 335.
120 Cf. Ibid. 336.

of a country. Regarding the role of institutions in political economy analyses, Alberto Alesina and Roberto Perotti write that "political-economy models begin with the assertion that economic policy choices are not made by social planners, who live only in academic papers. Rather, economic policy is the result of political struggle within an institutional structure".[121] Therefore for political economy models, rent-seeking behavior and the misuse of energy rents for maintaining patronage networks happens in the context of weak institutions.[122] If a country has strong institutions, energy rents will not have nearly as detrimental effect on the political system or economy as in a country with weak and underdeveloped institutions. As an example, the effects of natural resource wealth and energy rents on Norway's political and economic system were much different than in countries with weaker institutions, such as Algeria or Angola.[123]

3.3.2. The Theoretical Basis of IV 2: The Degree of Russian External Leverage

The theoretical underpinning of IV 2 is the literature on autocracy promotion and the effects of external influences on regime changes. One of the factors initiating scholarly interest in the phenomenon of authoritarian regimes attempting to promote autocracy was the perceived decline in democracy worldwide in the late 2000's. Regarding Freedom House's 2009 assessment of the so-called "freedom recession", Peter Burnell writes that "there is currently speculation about how far this trend can be attributed to the possibility that leading autocratic regimes are now on the march not just at home, but also in terms of their external relations, influencing other countries around the world. An important question is whether the so-called democratic rollback is benefitting from the help of foreign friends of authoritarian or semi-authoritarian rule?"[124]

The role of external factors in shaping regime change or outcomes in developing countries and those undergoing transformation was previously under researched in political science. Whereas the discipline of comparative politics focuses primarily on the internal factors which influence regime change, various branches of international relations theory tend to ignore the effects of interstate interaction on domestic politics.[125] After the end of the Cold War, however, the United States began to invest heavily in democracy promotion in various parts of the world, while the expansion of the EU and the conditionality imposed on prospective member states exerted noticeably positive effects on the political development of many post-communist countries in CEE. These developments led to increased interest in the influence of external factors on regime change, however this interest was primarily limited to the external promotion of democracy.

Along with the perceived "freedom recession", events in the post-Soviet space following the Col-

121 Alesina and Perotti 1994: 351.
122 Cf. Kolstad and Wiig 2009: 5318.
123 Cf. Ibid.
124 Burnell 2010: 1.
125 Cf. Ibid. 494.

ored Revolutions in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, in which authoritarian states in the region sought to contain the contagion of electoral revolutions, also brought the phenomenon of autocracy promotion to the attention of scholars. In the aftermath of the Colored Revolutions, the Belarussian political scientist Vitali Silitski observed two processes taking place in the post-Soviet region, namely the "*reassertion of Russia's (authoritarian) regional hegemony*" as well as the establishing of a so-called authoritarian international, which he referred to as "authoritarian convergence".[126] Describing these processes, Silitski writes:

> While some parts of the chain of revolutionary dominoes fell against the will of the regional hegemon, the Kremlin turned the more recent revolutionary states into battlegrounds where forces of change had to face uphill battles against forces or regression even as revolutions succeeded. These battleground conditions not only impeded democratic consolidation […] but also made them even less suitable to be nurseries of new revolutions.[127]

Autocracy promotion is, however, not a new phenomenon. During the Interwar Period (1919-1939), the Soviet Union under Lenin and Stalin, Mussolini's fascist Italy as well as National Socialist Germany played a considerable role in the collapse of democratic governance on the European continent.[128] During the Cold War, both the United States and the Soviet Union supported non-democratic regimes in Latin America, Africa and Asia. In Latin America, for example, the United States worked to undermine socialist governments and prevent potential Soviet allies from emerging. Furthermore, Washington was willing to give material and political support to anti-communist dictatorships to achieve this end. In CEE, the Soviet Union intervened militarily to suppress liberal reform movements in the countries of the Warsaw Pact from gaining ground.[129] In this sense, both democratic as well as authoritarian regimes can act as promoters of autocracy.

There are several prevalent explanations for why democracies would choose to promote democracy internationally. These range from idealistic arguments, whereby countries feel a sense of responsibility to further a system of governance deemed beneficial to mankind, to the "democratic peace" theory, which claims that democracies do not wage war against one another.[130] Other approaches view democracy promotion through a national security-oriented lens, whereby democratic governance removes the wellsprings of terrorism, such as political oppression, while others stress the economic benefits of democratic governance.[131]

With regard to autocracy promotion, there are three general strands of literature dealing with this topic and the question as to why autocracies would be interested in promoting their particular form

126 Silitski 2010: 341.
127 Ibid.
128 Cf. Kästner 2015: 493.
129 Cf. Ibid.
130 Cf. Burnell 2010: 10.
131 Cf. Ibid.

of governance. One such approach is presented by Thomas Ambrosio in his 2010 article 'Constructing a framework of authoritarian diffusion'. Ambrosio's concept of autocratic diffusion is based on two causal mechanisms developed by Zachary Elkins and Beth Simmons, namely appropriateness and effectiveness.[132] Appropriateness stipulates that policy decisions made by one government change the environment and the cost-benefit analysis of other governments making subsequent decisions. In such a scenario, certain practices become either more or less likely.[133] Relating this mechanism to autocratic diffusion, Ambrosio writes that "the rise of authoritarian powers and the relative decline of their democratic counterparts to set global standards could create conditions in which the relative appropriateness of democracy and autocracy would shift more toward the latter".[134] Effectiveness refers simply to the weighing of the pros and cons of adopting certain behaviors or policies by observing their success and failure in other countries. Examples of this mechanism include the effectiveness of China's authoritarian state-capitalist economic model as well as Russia's attempts to insulate itself from outside political pressure.[135] The more effective these policies prove to be, the more likely they will be adopted by other actors. While diffusion tends to describe a process whereby the transfer of ideas, practices or structures occurs without intention, Ambrosio does provide space for such intentions in his model, focusing on actors disseminating practices, but stopping short of forcing others to accept them. According to Ambrosio, "current autocrats wish to create conditions which delegitimize regime change and protect state (that is, regime) sovereignty. Rather than impose their form of government on others, they are primarily concerned with ensuring that the democratic West cannot impose its form of government on them".[136]

Julia Bader, Jörn Grävingholt and Antje Kästner approach autocracy promotion through a theoretical framework which combines a micro-level rational choice foundation with liberal foreign policy analysis. The authors start with the assumption that the preference for domestic political survival also influences a political actor's foreign policy choices. In order to retain power, an actor has to allocate goods to key social groups or coalitions, however the coalitions differ in democratic and authoritarian societies. While democratic coalitions tend to be broad and demand large amounts of public goods, autocratic coalitions tend to be smaller and leaders require private goods to buy loyalty. In essence, democratic societies are more geared towards forming encompassing coalitions while autocratic states tend more towards distributional coalitions.[137] These domestic factors thus drive demand for system convergence in a given region, due to similar incentive structures. As Bader et al. write, "for an autocratic regional power, the existence of smaller autocracies with additional allocation leeway, such as natural resources or certain geo-strategic assets, would

132 See: Elkins and Simmons 2005.
133 Cf. Ambrosio 2010: 379f.
134 Ibid. 380.
135 f. Ibid. 382.
136 Ambrosio 2010: 378.
137 Cf. Bader *et al.* 2010: 86.

contribute to the government's commitment to pay off its coalition".[138]

In two more recent studies, Rachel Vanderhill and Jakob Tolstrup have contributed further to the scholarly debate of autocracy promotion. In her 2013 book ***Promoting Authoritarianism Abroad***, Vanderhill considers how states promote authoritarianism and how it interacts with democracy promotion as well as local conditions in order to produce regime change. She focuses on how external actors, using positive and negative incentives, can alter the strategies and capabilities of elites in the receiving state, thus moving the existing regime in either a more democratic or authoritarian direction. For Vanderhill, the term autocracy promotion refers to a situation where an external actor "is actively supporting illiberal elites, groups, or regimes through direct assistance".[139] She views autocracy promotion by an autocratic power in its region as a strategy to increase its national security as well as the likelihood of regime survival.[140] In his 2013 publication ***Russia vs. The EU***, Tolstrup employs a positivist research agenda to study the influence of external actors (The EU and Russia) on the democratization in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. Tolstrup then discerns between positive external actors which strengthen another country's democratic performance, and negative external actors which weaken a country's democratic performance. According to Tolstrup, "it is possible for an external actor to act as both (regardless of its intentions), depending on the time and place, thus leaving it to the empirical analysis to settle the question".[141] Tolstrup's model of how external actors affect the democratization of a country focuses on geographical, historical and cultural factors, as well as linkages to external actors and the external actors' leverage. Similar to Vanderhill, Tolstrup also focuses on the role elites play in the process, which he terms "Gatekeeper Elites", and how they can facilitate or hinder linkages to an external actor.[142]

138 Ibid. 88.
139 Vanderhill 2013: 9.
140 Cf. Ibid.
141 Tolstrup 2013: 27.
142 Cf. Ibid. 39.

4. Research Design

In this section, the study's research design will be presented. Based on the work's theoretical underpinning which was outlined in section 3, the conceptualization as well as the operationalization of the study's two IVs will be carried out. In addition, the hypotheses to be tested empirically in section 5 of this work will be listed, and the case selection as well as the empirical study's time frame will also be clarified.

4.1. IV 1: The Amount of Energy Rents

4.1.1. The Conceptualization of IV 1

IV 1's concept is based on the theoretical underpinning of the rentier state theory which was outlined in section three of this paper. Specifically, the IVs conceptualization will follow the state-centered, political approach presented above. This approach assumes that natural resource wealth and high levels of energy rents will have a negative effect on a country's democratic performance through the workings of several causal mechanisms associated with rentierism. In this context, high levels of energy rents allow for country's ruling elites to utilize their country's energy wealth to buy influence and acquiescence through patronage networks, while the need to tax the citizenry is thus reduced, along with the necessity of political representation. High levels of energy rents also enable governments to fortify their position by investing resource wealth into the strengthening of the regime's security apparatus, which can be used to suppress dissent or democratic movements. These resources can also be utilized to further secure access to revenue streams emanating from the energy sector. In society, development based on resource wealth does not lead to conditions conducive for the facilitation of higher education rates or the emergence of occupational specialization, which are seen as important factors for the creation of an independent middle class. This theoretical underpinning, in turn, leads to this study's hypothesis for IV 1, which is presented below.

Hypothesis for IV 1 – The Amount of Energy Rents:

The higher the amount of energy rents, the lower the democratic performance.

4.1.2. The Operationalization of IV 1

In order to apply the rentier state theory and test the study's hypothesis for IV 1, an adequate measure for a country's respective income by way of natural resource rents will have to be found. In this context, the operationalization of IV 1 will be roughly based upon approaches developed by

both Roland Götz and Michael Herb.[143] As Roland Götz points out, resource rents are often measured using the following indicators:

1. Resource endowment per inhabitant;
2. Resource rents as a percentage of GDP, a percentage of a country's national budget or per inhabitant;
3. Natural resource exports as a percentage of a country's entire exports or as a percentage of GDP.[144]

The first approach is promising, however not suitable for this study because the resource endowment simply measures how much of a particular natural resource is present in a country, but it does not provide values for the amount of monetary revenue a government may generate through its extraction and sale. As Götz points out, the third approach, using natural point resources as a percentage of a country's entire exports or GDP, is the most common approach to measuring and studying the effects of energy rents on a country's political system. However, due to the limited scope of this study and the difficulty obtaining reliable and comprehensive statistics regarding post-Soviet countries' exports of natural resources, this study is going to adopt the second approach mentioned above as a methodological base for the operationalization of IV 1. More precisely, this study will use the following indicators to measure the amount of energy rents:

- Oil rents (as a percentage of GDP)
- Gas rents (as a percentage of GDP)

This approach is also in line with Michael Herb's definition of rentierism, which he claims can be measured by "rent revenue as a percentage of total government revenues".[145] Götz includes oil and gas transit rents for his case studies, however due to the difficulty obtaining reliable figures for oil and gas transit rents for the transit countries included in this study (primarily Belarus, Ukraine and, to a lesser extent, Moldova and Georgia), the oil and natural gas rents as a percentage of GDP from the World Bank's World Development Indicators will serve as proxies for the energy rents generated from point resources.[146] As mentioned above, the World Bank's definition of a rent will utilized for this variable, namely the difference between the value of production at world prices and the total costs of production.

In order to measure the amount of energy rents, the natural gas rents as a percentage of GDP will be added to the oil rents as a percentage of GDP in order to come up with a figure for the total percentage of GDP derived from energy rents.

143 Cf. Götz 2011: 9f; Cf. Herb 2005: 300-3.
144 Cf. Ibid. 9.
145 Herb 2005: 303.
146 In this context, Götz criticizes the World Bank's measurement of oil and gas rents as being too imprecise. He contends that that figures used for oil and gas rents can be interpreted as representing an upper limit for the rents, but not the actual amounts themselves (Cf. Götz 2011: 10). However, as proxies for oil and gas rents, they provide an approximate picture of the percentage of GDP generated through rents and can therefore be seen as appropriate for this study.

4.2. IV 2: The Degree of Russian External Leverage

4.2.1. The Conceptualization of IV 2

The conceptualization of IV 2 will be based on the theoretical approaches to autocracy promotion presented above in section 3.3.2. This theoretical approach assumes that regional autocratic powers will strive for system convergence in their neighborhoods in order to increase the likelihood of regime survival. External actors can either be categorized as negative or positive actors, depending on how they influence regime change in other countries. If an external actor improves another country's democratic performance, it is considered a positive actor, whereas if an external diminishes another country's democratic, it is considered a negative actor. The ties between the external actor and the receiving country play a key role in the ability of the external actor to influence the political regime of the receiving country. In the post-Soviet space, as Vitali Silitski and others have pointed out[147], Russia has played the role of a "black knight *par excellence*"[148], or a negative external actor, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, but in particular following the Colored Revolutions which swept through Eurasia at the beginning of the 2000's. In the aftermath of these events, Russia undertook a "counterrevolutionary offensive in the near abroad"[149] in order to prevent countries in the region from democratizing and moving closer to the west. Describing Russia's approach dealing with the contagion of electoral revolutions in its neighborhood, Silitski, like Tolstrup, underscores the importance of Russian leverage over countries in the post-Soviet space in its attempt to influence their political trajectories.[150] This theoretical underpinning, in turn, leads to this study's hypothesis for IV 2, which is presented below.

Hypothesis for IV 2 – The Degree of Russian External Leverage:

The higher the degree of Russian external leverage, the lower the democratic performance.

4.2.2. The Operationalization of IV 2

In order to apply the theory of autocracy promotion to the post-Soviet states considered in this study, an adequate measure for the degree of external Russian leverage is needed. One such approach has been developed and presented by Jakob Tolstrup in his 2009 article 'Studying a negative external actor: Russia's management of stability and instability in the "Near Abroad"'. Operation-

147 See: Ambrosio 2009; Silitski 2010; Tolstrup 2009 and 2014a and Vanderhill 2013.
148 Tolstrup 2014b: 8.
149 Silitski 2010: 345.
150 In this context, Silitski writes that "Russia's monopoly position as a supplier of vital natural resources for the majority of the battleground states gives the Kremlin a permanent powerful resource of influence, coercion, and control. The hard power instruments were further enhanced by Russia's military presence in the conflict zones of some battleground states and its de facto protectorate over breakaway regions" (Ibid.).

alizing Russia's influence in the post-Soviet space, Tolstrup constructs a framework encompassing three distinct categories of Russian foreign policy levers, namely military levers, political levers and economic levers. The specific levers from each category that will be investigated in this study are presented below in Table 4.

Table 4: Russian Foreign Policy Levers in the Post-Soviet Space

Military Levers	Political Levers	Economic Levers
Military Interventions	Support of anti-Western Governments or Opposition to pro-Western Governments	Energy Monopoly
Military Bases	Support of Secessionist Republics	Trade Embargos
Peacekeeping Forces	Multilateral Organizations Dominated by Russia	

Source: Tolstrup 2009: 929.

In order to assess Russia's external leverage on the six countries included in this study, each of the eight separate levers listed above in Table 4 will be evaluated and assigned a rating of "high", "medium", or "low" for each particular country. A rating of "high" will be assigned a score of 3, a rating of "medium" a score of 2, while a "low" rating will be given a score of 1. The scores of all eight levers will be totaled to create an aggregate score which will represent the level of external Russian leverage on the respective country. A breakdown of the criteria for the "high", "medium" and "low" rating for each lever will be offered below in Table 5.

These levers capture a broad spectrum of the foreign policy tools Russia has at its disposal in order to exert pressure on neighboring states in the so-called Near Abroad. This list of leverages is, however, not exhaustive, but it should offer significant insight into Russia's ability to attempt to influence the political trajectories of former Soviet states. According to Tolstrup, Russia tries to exert influence on states in the near abroad and influence their development through two approaches, namely managed stability and managed instability. The former is "most likely to be conducted in republics that are not striving toward Western integration and democratic reforms", whereas the latter "is most likely to be found in countries that seem more or less committed to democratic principles and Western integration".[151] The states in the post-Soviet space which belong to the former group include Azerbaijan, Armenia and Belarus, while those that are associated with the latter group are Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.[152] Managed stability refers to Russia's attempts to stabilize incumbents in country's which are deemed not to threaten Russia's interests. Managed instability refers to Russia's strategy of trying to destabilize governments it sees as unfriendly or with too close ties to the West. In the latter case, "instability is only ac-

151 Tolstrup 2009: 931.
152 Cf. Ibid.

cepted in the short run in the hope that it will lead to regime change and increase Russian influence in the longer run".[153]

Table 5: Operationalization of IV 2: Degree of Russian External Leverage

Military Levers	**Military Interventions**	**Military Bases**	**Peacekeeping Forces**
High	More than 1 Russian Military Intervention	More than 1 Russian Military Base	Russian Peacekeeping Forces in More than 1 Region of a Country
Medium	1 Russian Military Intervention	1 Russian Military Base	Russian Peacekeeping Forces in 1 Region of a Country
Low	No Russian Military Interventions	No Russian Military Bases	No Russian Peacekeeping Forces
Political Levers	**Support of Anti-Western Governments/Opposition to Pro-Western Governments**	**Support of Secessionist Republics**	**Multilateral Organizations Dominated by Russia**
High	Significant Support and Political Intervention for anti-Western Governments/Against Pro-Western Governments	Political Support of Secessionist Republics and Recognition of Independence	Membership in More than One Multilateral Organization Dominated by Russia
Medium	Moderate Support for anti-Western Governments/Opposition to Pro-Western Governments	Political Support of Secessionist Republics, but No Recognition of Independence	Membership in One Multilateral Organization Dominated by Russia
Low	No Significant Support for Anti-Western Governments/Opposition to Pro-Western Governments	No Political Support of Secessionist Republics	No Membership in Multilateral Organizations Dominated by Russia
Economic Levers	**Energy Monopoly**	**Trade Embargos**	
High	Dependence on Russian Energy Resources for More than Half of Energy Demand	More than 1 Trade Embargo Imposed by Russia	
Medium	Dependence on Russian Energy Resources for Up to Half of Energy Demand	1 Trade Embargo Imposed by Russia	
Low	Largely Independent of Russian Energy Resources	No Trade Embargos Imposed by Russia	

153 Tolstrup 2009: 932.

4.3. Case Selection and Time Frame

As outlined in the methodology section above, and in line with the positivist approach employed in this study, in order test the study's two IVs, the case selection from the countries Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine will take place on the side of the IV using John Stuart Mill's method of difference.[154] The cases that will be chosen for the empirical test of the study's hypotheses will be those with the highest degree of variation on the side of the IVs. This means that the cases with the highest and lowest values will be selected. Given the similar social, economic and political starting points and legacies of former Soviet countries in Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, many contextual differences between the countries could be controlled for. The study's time frame will encompass the years 1993 to 2014. This period captures the development of post-Soviet countries since having gained independence in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991.

With regards to IV 1, the cases to be chosen to test the variable's hypothesis will be those with both the highest and the lowest values for IV 1. Specifically, this means that the cases with the highest and lowest mean percentage of GDP derived from oil and natural gas rents over the entire period of the study's time frame (1993-2014) will be selected. In Table 6 below, the mean percentage of GDP derived from oil and natural gas rents are presented.

Table 6: Case Selection for IV 1

Country	*Mean % of GDP Derived from Oil and Natural Gas Rents (1993-2013)*	*Selection*
Armenia	0.0%	
Azerbaijan	45%	*X (High)*
Belarus	1.7%	
Georgia	0.3%	
Moldova	0.05%	*X (Low)*
Ukraine	3.1%	

Source: The World Bank: World Development Indicators

Based on the mean percentage of GDP derived from oil and natural gas resources between 1996 and 2013 presented above, Azerbaijan will be chosen as the case with the highest amount of energy rents, while Moldova will be selected as the country with the lowest amount of energy rents. Although Armenia has the lowest amount of energy rents, with 0.0% of its GDP having been de-

154 See Van Era 1997.

rived from oil or gas rents, this case was not chosen due to the fact that throughout the entire time period, no measurable oil and natural gas rents were present in its data. Since this was the case, the case with the next lowest measureable amount of energy rents was chosen, namely Moldova.

In regards to IV 2, those cases will be chosen which show the highest and the lowest aggregate values for the "Degree of Russian External Influence" throughout the study's time frame (1993-2014). Below in Table 7, each country's values for Russia's external military, political and economic leverages are presented, along with an aggregate total of those values. The sources and literature used to determine the ratings of each leverage for the study's six countries can be found in the appendix attached at the end of this study.

Table 7: Case Selection for IV 2

Levers	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine
Military Levers						
Military Interventions	Low/1	Low/1	Low/1	High/3	Medium/2	High/3
Military Bases	Medium/2	Medium/2	High/3	High/3	Medium/2	High/3
Peacekeeping Forces	Low/1	Low/1	Low/1	High/3	Medium/2	Low/1
Political Levers						
Support of anti-Western Governments/Opposition to pro-Western Governments	Med/2	Low/1	High/3	High/3	Medium/2	High/3
Support of Secessionist Republics	Low/1	Medium/2	Low/1	High/3	Medium/2	High/3
Multilateral Organizations Dominated by Russia	High/3	Medium/2	High/3	Low/1	Medium/2	Low/1
Economic Levers						
Energy Monopoly	Medium/2	Low/1	High/3	Medium/2	High/3	High/3
Trade Embargos	Low/1	Low/1	High/3	High/3	High/3	Medium/2
Total Score	13	11 *X (Low)*	18	21 *X (High)*	18	19

Source: See Appendix: Table 20

Based on the total scores for Russia's military, political and economic leverages in the post-Soviet states investigated in this study, Georgia, has an aggregate score of 21, will be chosen as the case with the highest degree of Russian external influence, while Azerbaijan, with an total score of 11, will be selected as the case with the lowest degree.

5. Empirical Test

In this section, the study's two hypotheses presented above will be tested on the cases selected in section 4. First, the empirical results of the DV "Democratic Performance" for the four selected cases will be presented, along with an overview of the political developments in those countries since having gained independence in the early 1990s. Second, the empirical results of the study's two IVs, "The Amount of Energy Rents" and "The Degree of External Russian Leverage", will be laid out and accompanied by, in the case of IV 1, an overview of the respective country's energy sector, and in the case of IV 2, a summary of Russian influence on the particular country's political, economic and social systems since 1993. A discussion of the results of the empirical test will be carried out below in section 6.

5.1. DV: Degree of Democratic Performance

5.1.1. Azerbaijan

Table 8: Azerbaijan: Political Rights and Civil Liberties Ratings

	1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013
Political Rights	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Civil Liberties	2	2	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	2

Source: Freedom House: Freedom in the World

Azerbaijan is located in the Southern Caucasus region of Eurasia on the western shore of the Caspian Sea. The oil-rich nation has a population of roughly 9.3 million inhabitants. In terms of political leadership, Azerbaijan represents one of the only dynastic regimes in the post-Soviet space, following the presidential succession from Heydar Aliyev (1993-2003) to his son Ilham Aliyev (2003 to present) in 2003. The Aliyev regime has been considered a hegemonic authoritarian regime, characterized by an acute lack of political competition.[155]

Not unlike other states in the former Soviet Union, Azerbaijan experienced an extremely difficult transition from being a member state of the Soviet Union to being an independent country. The early 1990s were marred by ethnic violence between Armenians and Azerbaijanis which culminated in open warfare between Azerbaijan and Armenians in the breakaway region of Nagorno-Kara-

155 Cf. LePorte 2015: 341.

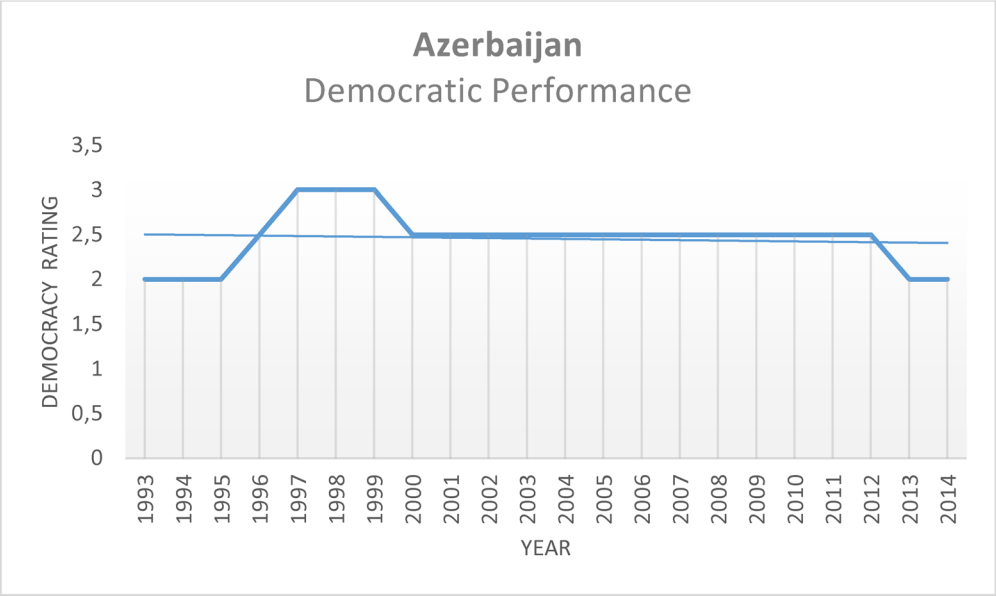
bakh in 1992. A ceasefire was eventually signed in May 1994 between the belligerent parties, after significant territorial gains had been made by Armenians and the Azerbaijani military forces had suffered a succession of crushing defeats.[156] It was in this chaotic political environment that Heydar Alieyev captured the office of the presidency after having carried out a military coup in March 1993. During the Soviet and early post-Soviet periods, Aliyev had been one of Azerbaijan's most important powerbrokers, having served as the head of the Azerbaijan S.S.R., the head of Azerbaijan's K.G.B. as well as a member of the republic's Politburo.[157]

After taking power in a country in political, economic and social chaos after a brief political opening at the end of the Soviet period and the beginning of independence, Aliyev "promoted stability over national assertion, and made state-building and regime consolidation the overriding objectives of his remaining years in power".[158] After surviving several assassination and coup attempts, Heydar Aliyev was able to consolidate his political regime by the end of the 1990s. This was also due in part to the privatization of the country's oil and gas fields to foreign investors, as opposed to domestic actors. This ensured that the Azerbaijan would "benefit from foreign technical expertise without losing control of how the resulting revenues would be used, unlike in Russia, which privatized to domestic actors".[159] By the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, oil revenues would account for circa 40% of the country's overall revenues.

As Azerbaijan's political rights and civil liberties ratings, presented above in Table 8, show, the Caucasian republic had been considered an "unfree", authoritarian regime since Heydar Alieyev came to power in a coup in 1993. However, during the years 1997 to 2002, his regime was able to make slight improvements in the area of civil liberties, which helped Azerbaijan obtain a "partly free" rating from Freedom House. This was due to the fact that in 1995 and 2000, Azerbaijan held parliamentary elections with opposition parties and, as Scott Radnitz points out, "a moderately independent media developed in the mid-1990s and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) supported by the West opened in the country".[160] However, at the beginning of the 2000s, income from oil sales allowed the regime to strengthen its position and prevent serious challenges from the opposition from endangering its rule. After falling ill with cancer, Heydar Aliyev died in November 2003. However, before his death, Heydar installed his son, Ilham Aliyev, as prime minister and campaigned for him to become the country's next president. Ilham was subsequently elected president in November 2003 in elections marred by fraud, causing widespread unrest in the capital city Baku.

156 Cf. Ibid. 344.
157 Cf. Radnitz 2012: 62.
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid. 64.
160 Radnitz 2012: 63.

Figure 2: Azerbaijan: Democratic Performance (1993-2014)



Source: Freedom House: Freedom in the World

Since coming to power, Ilham has managed to prevent the contagion of political unrest from both the Colored Revolutions as well as the Arab Spring from penetrating Azerbaijan. Fraudulent elections in both 2003 and 2005 drew protestors into the streets and elicited a violent crackdown from the government. Elections held in both 2008 and 2013, however, have become decreasingly competitive, have generated less and less interest from society[161] and have taken place without international observers.[162] 2014 saw an unprecedented crack on civil society in Azerbaijan in light of the Euromaidan protests in Ukraine and the ouster of Victor Yanukovych. U.S.-based NGOs, for example, were forced to close, while prominent human rights defenders, lawyers and opposition journalists were arrested on politically motivated charges.[163] Independent media experienced a similar crackdown in 2014.

This deterioration in political and civil liberties is evident in Figure 2 above, which displays Azerbaijan's values for the DV "Democratic Performance" between 1993 and 2014, along with a trend line. With the exception of the period from 1997 to 2000 where Azerbaijan was considered "partly free" due to modest liberalization mentioned above, the country has consistently remained an "unfree" authoritarian regime. This continuing authoritarian trend has only deepened in recent years. Regarding the regimes longevity, trajectory and declining democratic performance, Scott Radnitz writes that "the foremost medium-term factor ensuring its security was the consolidation of the ruling elite, which shared common methods of governing and benefitted materially from its

161 Cf. LePorte 2015: 355.
162 Cf. Freedom House 2015c: 91.
163 Cf. Freedom House 2015c: 91.

control of the state. This gave it a stake in preserving the status quo, which also meant that further democratic and economic reforms were not in its interests".[164]

5.1.2. Moldova

Table 9: Moldova: Political Rights and Civil Liberties Ratings

	1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013
Political Rights	3	4	5	6	6	5	5	5	5	5	5
Civil Liberties	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	5

Source: Freedom House: Freedom in the World

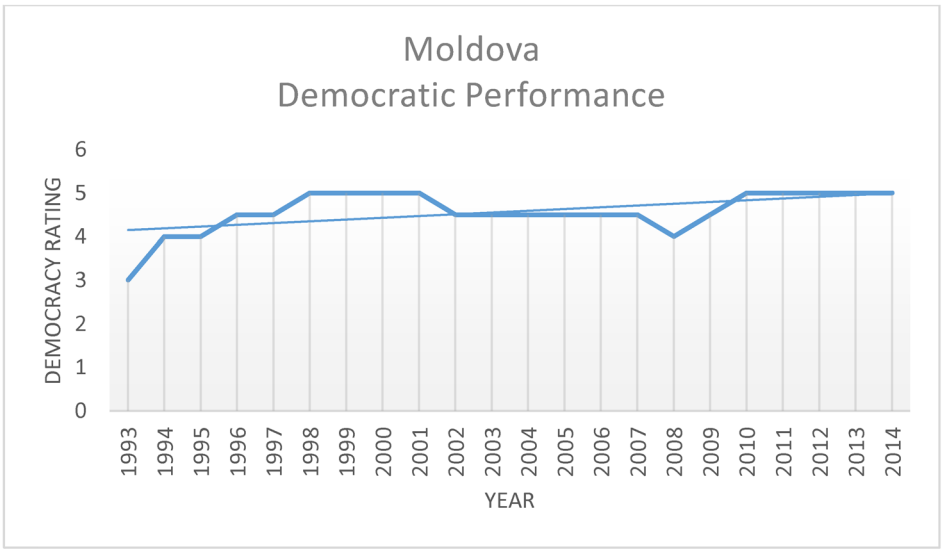
Moldova is a small, land-locked former Soviet republic located in South Eastern Europe, wedged between Ukraine and Romania. The country has a population of roughly 3.6 million inhabitants. Regarding Moldova's political system and trajectory since having gained independence from the Soviet Union, Lucan Way writes the following: "Moldova represents one of the most puzzling cases of pluralism in the post-communist world. Despite extreme poverty, lack of democratic history, rural population, and low educational attainment, Moldova was more pluralistic than any other post-Soviet country outside of the Baltic States".[165] Explaining the counterintuitive nature of Moldova's political system during the 1990s and early 2000s, which saw two incumbent presidents leave office in a democratic fashion and a functioning balance of power, Way describes Moldova's state as being "pluralism by default".[166] Reasons behind Moldova's pluralism include stark divisions over national identity, the absence of robust rule of law, as well as the state's institutional design.[167]

Similar to Azerbaijan, Moldova's transition from a former Soviet republic to an independent country was aggravated by a separatist conflict in the eastern industrial region of Transnistria. Transnistria was inhabited predominantly by Russophone inhabitants, who feared a possible integration of Moldova with Romania. In December 1991, the Trans-Dniester Moldova Republic (PMR) held a referendum in which the territory agreed to succeed from Moldova. In 1992, open warfare broke out between Moldova and the PMR, which was supported by elements of the Russian 14th Army based in the region, which internationalized the conflict. A ceasefire was eventually signed in July 1992 and the conflict remains frozen until present, similar to other "frozen conflicts" in the post-Soviet space, including Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

164 Radnitz 2012: 69.
165 Way 2003: 454f.
166 Pluralism by default, according to Way, refers to a situation where "the immediate source of political competition is not a robust civil society, strong democratic institutions, or democratic leadership but incumbent incapacity" (Ibid. 455).
167 Cf. Tudoroiu 2015: 656.

The state of pluralism by default in Moldova changed, temporarily, with the electoral victory of the Communist Party of Moldova (PCRM) in 2001. Under the leadership of Moldova's then third president, Vladimir Voronin (2001-2009), a semi-consolidated authoritarian regime was established in the post-Soviet country, which eliminated sources of pluralism and competition. Once in power, "the PCRM used its disciplined parliamentary majority to establish control over all major state institutions. The judiciary and the electoral authorities were packed, and the state media (still the dominant source of news), which had been relatively pluralist in the 1990s […] fell under full PCRM control".[168] The communists' political control of Moldova would eventually come to an end in 2009. After elections in 2009, the PCRM was unable to secure enough votes to elect the president and student protests were brutally suppressed by security forces. New elections lead to the election of a pro-European alliance, namely the Alliance for European Integration (AEI), led by Vladimir Fiat. In November 2014, new parliamentary elections were held. The election was considered especially important regarding the future orientation of Moldova, particularly in the context of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War. The choice was between parties favoring deeper integration with the EU, and those calling for a more pro-Russian course and increased cooperation with the Russian-led EEU. Despite the importance of the vote, voter turnout reached an all-time low of 55.80 percent.[169] The pro-Russian Party of Socialists (PSRM) was able to secure the most seats in parliament, followed by the Liberal Democratic Party (PLDM) and the communist PCRM. It would take until July 2015 for a new governing coalition to be formed between the PLDM and the Liberal Party. On July 27, 2015, Valeriu Strelet from the PLDM was confirmed as the country's new prime minister.[170]

Figure 3: Moldova: Democratic Performance (1993-2014)



Source: Freedom House: Freedom in the World

168 Levitsky and Way 2010: 231f.
169 Freedom House 2015c: 438.
170 See: RFE/RL 2015b: 'Moldova president nominates Strelets as next prime minister'. <http://www.rferl.org/content/moldova-nominates-strelets-as-next-prime-minister/27155531.html> (Accessed 01.08.2015).

As the values and the trend line for Moldova's democratic performance in Figure 3 above confirm, Moldova has been steadily improving its democracy rating since 1993, however with visible setbacks during communist rule between 2001 and 2009. Despite the progress made in terms of political rights and civil liberties, Moldova still occupies the grey zone between authoritarianism and democracy and has yet been able to move beyond a "partly free" rating by Freedom House. Considerable progress has been made in the area of civil liberties, as the country has received its highest rating in the post-Soviet period in 2010, namely "5". However, considerable problems remain, especially regarding corruption and the relations between Chişinău and the separatist regions of Transnistria and Găgăuzia. After recent elections, Moldova has continued on its pro-European path, having signed an Association Agreement with the EU and recently become the first Eastern Partnership (EP) country to enter a liberalized visa regime with the EU.

5.1.3. Georgia

Table 10: Georgia: Political Rights and Civil Liberties Ratings

	1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013
Political Rights	3	4	5	5	4	4	5	4	4	4	5
Civil Liberties	3	3	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	5	5

Source: Freedom House: Freedom in the World

Georgia is a small republic located in the Southern Caucasus Mountains on the eastern shore of the Black Sea. Georgia has a population of roughly 4.5 million inhabitants. Much like Moldova and Azerbaijan, Georgia's transition to post-communism was significantly impaired by civil war and secessionist conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Georgia declared independence from the Soviet Union in spring 1991. Georgia's first elected president in the post-communist period was Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1991-1992), who was elected in May 1991 on a nationalist platform, pledging to regain control of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which had both been autonomous regions during the Soviet period. Although Gamsakhurdia was elected with an overwhelming majority, obtaining 87 percent of the vote, his coalition collapsed in September 1991 and the country's National Guard withdrew its support of the president, leaving him without armed forces.[171] A little more than half a year after his election, Gamaskhurdia was overthrown in a coup in early 1992. The victorious paramilitary groups that had ousted Gamsakhurdia were unable to impose order on the country and eventually invited Eduard Shevardnadze to assume the post of president. Shevardnadze had previously served as the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union as well as the First Secre-

171 Cf. Levitsky and Way 2010: 222.

tary of the Georgian Communist Party between 1972 and 1985. Describing the dire state of Georgia inherited by Shevardnadze, Theodor Tudoroiu writes that the country was "little more than a failed state. Nearly 20 percent of its territory was beyond the central government's control. Abkhazia and South Ossetia had seceded under Russian protection. Adjaria was controlled by its local potentate […] Since independence the country has been under constant pressure from Russia".[172]

Shevardnadze was able to impose some semblance of order on the country and end the armed conflicts with secessionist regions. Elections in 1995 saw Shevardnadze's Citizen's Union of Georgia (CUG) win 107 out of 235 parliamentary seats. The vote, however, was marred by widespread claims of manipulation and fraud.[173] Georgia under Shevardnadze has been described as a "weak kleptocracy"[174], wracked by corruption and mismanagement. In this chaotic situation, "government officials misappropriated international aid or helped sell off state industries to their associates. Off-the-record deals were said to account for 60-70 percent of the country's total economic activity. The state could not deliver basic services, repair the crumbling infrastructure, enforce the law, or collect taxes".[175]

In the early 2000's, support for Shevardnadze's CUG dropped dramatically. Top officials and deputies from the CUG began to abandon Shevardnadze, including the then Justice Minister Mikheil Saakashvili. The extent of the CUG's decline was made evident in local elections in 2002, which saw the coalition receive just 4 percent of the vote in the capital Tbilisi.[176] Massively fraudulent elections on November 2, 2003 led to Shevardnadze's newly formed coalition "For a New Georgia!" winning a slim majority of seats. This in turn sparked opposition protests, led by Mikheil Saakashvili, which culminated in Georgia's parliament being stormed on November 22, 2003 and the subsequent resignation of Shevardnadze. These events would come to be referred to as the Rose Revolution, which was the first of several so-called Colored Revolutions to sweep through Eurasia in the coming years.

In early 2004, parliamentary elections were held and Saakashvili's UNM obtained 96 percent of the vote and won circa two thirds of the seats in parliament. During his time in office, Saakashvili implemented various state-building measures and was able to significantly reduce endemic corruption in the country. However, Saakashvili was unsuccessful in institutionalizing democratic rule. Commenting on Saakashvili's governing style, Levitsky and Way write that "media harassment persisted, including tax raids of independent television stations, prosecution of journalists, and government pressure to cancel programs critical of Saakashvili […] The judiciary was packed, and government critics were occasionally arrested, and in a few cases, charged with treason".[177] In

172 Tudoroiu 2007: 319.
173 Cf. Levitsky and Way 2010: 223.
174 Tudoroiu 2007: 319.
175 Ibid. 319f.
176 Cf. Levitsky and Way 2010: 224.
177 Levitsky and Way 2010: 227.

2007, after the arrest of former defense minister Irakli Okruashvili on corruption charges, opposition protests broke out in the capital. Saakashvili's government responded by violently breaking up the protests and declaring a state of emergency. As a result, "demonstrations were banned, private news-broadcasting was suspended, and several television states […] were taken off the air".[178] After early elections in January 2008, which were also marred by allegations of fraud, Saakashvili successfully obtained a second term.

During his time as president, 2004-2013, Mikheil Saakashvili was unable to reestablish control over the secessionist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Throughout 2008, tensions and provocations had been increasing between Georgia and the two breakaway regions. As August approached, the situation between South Ossetia and Georgia came to a head. On the night of 7-8 August, Georgian forces launched an attack on Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia.[179] On the following morning, Georgian forces carried out a ground invasion of Tskhinvali and surrounding areas. Georgia's moves prompted a Russian retaliatory attack.[180] Georgia was unable to counter Russian advances and the conflict ended with a ceasefire negotiated by then French President Nicholas Sarkozy. Russia subsequently deepened its occupation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and recognized the two regions as independent.

In parliamentary elections in October 2012, Saakashvili's UNM was defeated by the opposition Georgian Dream (GD) coalition, led by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili. Power passing to Ivanishvili marked the first orderly and democratic transfer of power in Georgia's post-Soviet era. Saakashvili's second term expired in October 2013 and Giorgi Margvelashvili from GD became Georgia's new president. Constitutional amendments also came into effect, shifting power in Georgia from the president to the prime minister and the parliament.[181] Ivanishvili resigned as prime minister in November 2013, and Irakli Garibashvili become the country's new prime minister.

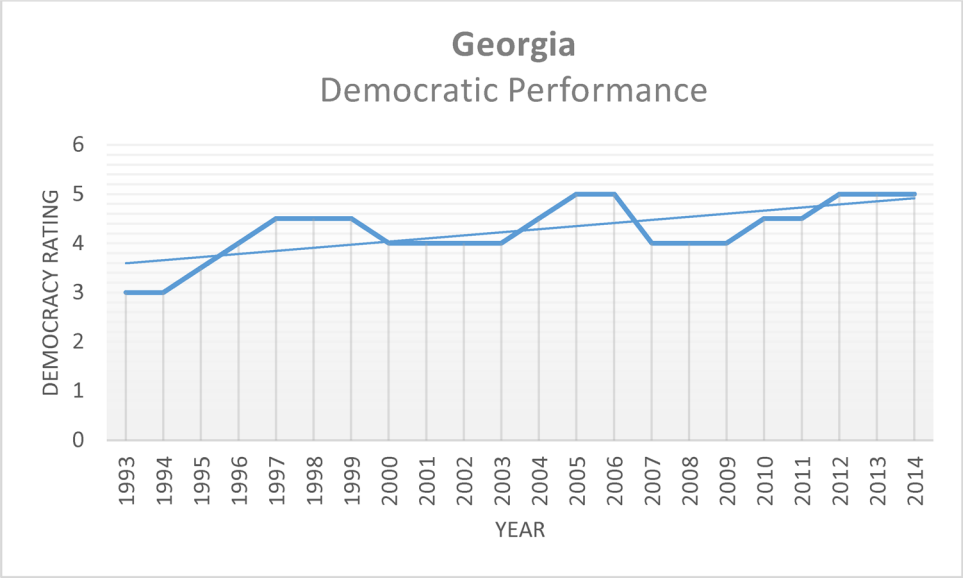
178 Ibid.

179 Tagliavini 2009b: 209.

180 Since the outbreak of war between Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the early 1990s, CIS i.e. Russian peacekeeping forces had been stationed in the two regions. Russian forces were also killed in Georgia's initial attack on Tskhinvali. The Russo-Georgian war of 2008 will be discussed in greater detail below in section 5.3.

181 Cf. Freedom House 2015c: 248.

Figure 4: Georgia: Democratic Performance (1993-2014)



Source: Freedom House: Freedom in the World

As the values and the trend line presented above in Figure 4 show, Georgia's democratic performance has improved steadily since 1993, however, it has yet to reach the status of a consolidated democracy. There have also been setbacks along the way, with Georgia's democratic performance diminishing between 1999 and 2003 under Shevardnadze, as well as between 2006 and 2009 under Saakashvili. Regarding the current state of civil rights and freedom of the press in Georgia, Freedom House comments that "in 2014, Georgia continued, albeit slowly, to roll back some of the limits on civil liberties from the UNM era, but the GD government frequently complained about the media and civil society".[182]

5.2. IV 1: The Amount of Energy Rents

5.2.1. Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is considered one of the oldest oil-producing nations in the world and a key exporter to the European market. Writing on the history of Azerbaijan's oil production, Mahmoud Ghafouri notes that "the Caspian fields began producing oil near Baku, Azerbaijan, in 1871 and accounted for half of the world's limited production in 1900".[183] The country's gas and oil fields continued to be exploited during the Soviet period, however many of these fields had begun to dry up. One

182 Freedom House 2015c: 250.
183 Ghafouri 2008: 82.

of the key indigenous players in Azerbaijan's energy industry is the "State Oil Company of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SOCAR). The exploration and exploitation of new oil and gas fields since independence, however, has taken place primarily in cooperation with Western oil and gas companies. Cooperation generally takes place within the framework of a so-called "Product Sharing Agreement" (PSA), two of which have become very important for Azerbaijan's economy, namely the Azeri-Chirag-Güneshli oil field (ACG) as well as the Shah-Deniz gas field.[184] The ACG field contains roughly 5.4 billion barrels of oil and up to 70 billion cubic meters of gas and is operated by the consortium "Azerbaijan International Operating Company" (AIOC). British Petroleum (BP) has a leading stake in the consortium with 34.14%.[185] In September 1994, AIOC signed a 30-year contract to develop the ACG field, which was worth 8 billion US-Dollars.[186] The Shah-Deniz gas field is estimated to contain between 400 and 700 billion cubic meters of natural gas, and it is also operated by a consortium headed by BP.[187] Since entering in its first PSA in the mid-1990s, Azerbaijan has concluded up to 26 such agreements in total to develop its oil and gas fields in the Caspian Sea.[188]

In order to manage the country's energy rents and wealth, Azerbaijan established a sovereign wealth fund[189] in 1999, called the State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan (SOFAZ), which became operational in 2001. According to Kenan Aslanli, SOFAZ's revenue consists of a mixture of "the proceeds from the sales of Azerbaijan's share in hydrocarbons, transit fees, bonus payments, and acreage fees, revenues from the management of the Fund's assets and other revenues".[190] The fund has three main objectives, namely to maintain macroeconomic stability and to decrease the country's dependency on oil revenues as well as to attempt to non-energy related sectors of the economy, to preserve oil revenues for future generations and to finance socio-economic projects.[191]

Azerbaijan's oil production in the post-Soviet period can be divided into three distinct periods. The first phase, between 1991 and 1996, is referred to by Hannes Meissner as the "pre-oil phase".[192] During this period, Azerbaijan was still working oil fields which had been developed and exploited during the Soviet period. Production declined from around 222 thousand barrels a day to circa 180 thousand barrels a day.[193] During the second phase, dubbed the "early-oil phase" (1997-2005) by Meissner, production increased significantly, primarily due to the exploitation of the ACG field. Output during this phase increased from roughly 180 thousand barrels per day to 440 thousand per day in 2005. It was during this period that Azerbaijan became a net exporter of oil. Regarding oil

184 Cf. Meissner 2010b: 2.
185 Cf. Ibid.
186 Cf. Ghafouri 2008: 83.
187 Cf. Meissner 2010b: 2.
188 Cf. Guliyev 2009: 4.
189 Sovereign wealth funds are "government-owned investment funds operated in private financial markets" (Aslanli 2015: 116).
190 Ibid. 117.
191 Cf. Ibid.
192 Meissner 2010b: 3.
193 Cf. Meissner 2010b: 3.

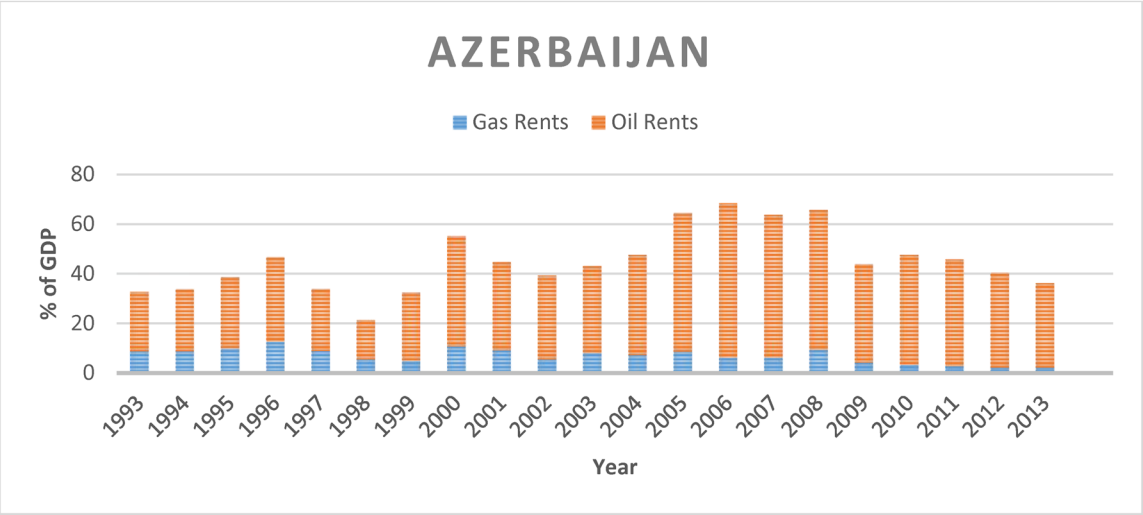
revenues, Meissner writes that they also experienced a dramatic rise in during the early-oil phase, and "not least due to rising oil prices on the world market, [they] continued to increase to around 1.051 million U.S. dollars in 2005, reaching a level of around 1.486 million U.S. dollars in 2005".[194]

The final phase is referred appropriately as the "big oil phase", which has been continuing since 2006. One of the key factors affecting oil output during this period is the fact that the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline (BTC), whose construction was completed in 2005, came online in 2006. The 1,040-mile pipeline was built by a BP-led consortium and it was projected to peak at deliveries of up to 1 million barrels of oil per day in 2009.[195] Annual profits of up to 21 billion US-Dollars were expected, however due to the collapse oil prices as a result of the worldwide financial crisis in 2008 and 2009, oil revenues only reached roughly 12 billion US-Dollars in 2009.[196] In January 2014, Azerbaijan's proved crude oil reserves were estimated to be roughly 7 billion barrels, and its production in 2013 was roughly 810,000 barrels of oil per day.[197] According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), Azerbaijan's crude oil exports peaked in 2010 and have declined every year since.[198]

Traditionally an oil-producing nation and an importer of natural gas from Russia, Azerbaijan became a net exporter of natural gas in 2007, due to production from the Shah-Deniz gas field. The main export route for Azerbaijani natural gas is the South Caucasus Pipeline, or the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum Pipeline (BTE), which has a transit capacity of 300 billion cubic feet per year.[199] Transit capacity is expected to increase to up to 800 billion cubic feet after upgrades to the pipeline system in the coming years. The export of natural is expected to play an increasing important role in Azerbaijani commodities exports in the coming years.

194 Ibid.
195 Cf. Ghafouri 2008: 93.
196 Cf. Meissner 2010b: 3.
197 Cf. EIA 2014: 2.
198 Cf. Ibid. 4
199 Cf. Ibid. 8.

Figure 5: Azerbaijan: The Amount of Energy Rents (1993-2013)



Source: World Bank: World Development Indicators

Azerbaijan's increased production of both oil and natural gas has been reflected in the yearly amount of energy rents the country has taken in over the previous twenty years. A dramatic increase in the amount of energy rents as a percentage of GDP can be discerned on in Figure 5 above after 2005. This was the year that Azerbaijan began exploiting the ACG field. This was accompanied by the BTC pipeline coming online, which increased export capacity. According to data from the World Bank, Azerbaijan's oil and gas rents peaked in 2006 with a combined total of 68.4 percent of GDP, which is more than double the energy rents accrued in 1993, at 32.7 percent. Combined oil and gas rents remained above 60 percent of GDP through 2008, however a steep decline took place in 2009 (from 65.6 percent to 43.8 percent). This was primarily due to the collapse of world commodity prices in light of the Global Financial Crisis. For the entire time span of this study, Azerbaijan's annual mean percentage of GDP derived from oil and natural gas rents was 44.92 percent. The overwhelming majority of energy rents were derived from the exploitation of the country's bountiful oil resources, which averaged 38 percent of GDP per year. The sale and export of natural gas has contributed considerably less to Azerbaijan's resource wealth, averaging circa 6 percent of GDP per annum. However, the role of natural gas in Azerbaijan's economy is expected to increase over the coming years with the exploration and exploitation of new gas fields in the Caspian Sea. Regarding the effects of the energy sector on Azerbaijan's economy, Anja Franke et al. note that it has "triggered certain asymmetrical development in the country: there are high growth rates in the oil and gas industries, while non-oil sectors have attracted little attention, and the government has neglected to introduce policies of diversification".[200] Considering the high level of energy rents in Azerbaijan's annual GDP, the neglect of other economic sectors as well as the fact that

200 Franke *et al.* 2009: 121.

energy exports account for roughly 90 percent of total exports[201], Azerbaijan can be considered a rentier state[202] with a high amount of energy rents.

5.2.2. Moldova

Moldova is one of Europe's smallest energy markets and can be considered the opposite of Azerbaijan in terms of indigenous natural resource wealth. Describing Moldova's overall energy situation, Agata Łoskot writes that the South-Eastern European country "has practically no domestic hydrocarbon resources and relies heavily on imported gas, petroleum products, [and] coal for half of the domestic electricity demand".[203] Moldova does, however, serve as a transit country for Russian natural gas deliveries to the Balkans as well as to Turkey. Moldova's transit capacity for natural gas runs at circa 44 billion cubic meters per year, however its pipeline network generally is not utilized to its full capacity. In 2009, for example, Moldova transited around 17.9 billion cubic meters of Russian natural gas to Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Western Turkey.[204] The conflict between Moldova and the separatist region of Transnistria complicates Moldova's import and transit of Russian natural gas. Commenting on this situation, Katja Yafimava writes that "all Russian gas flowing to Europa across Moldova has first to cross Transdniestria. Whereas *de jure* Transdniestria is part of the Republic of Moldova and thus exists within the framework of latter's legal system, the Moldovan government *de facto* has no control over Transdniestrian territory, and hence cannot enforce any laws there".[205]

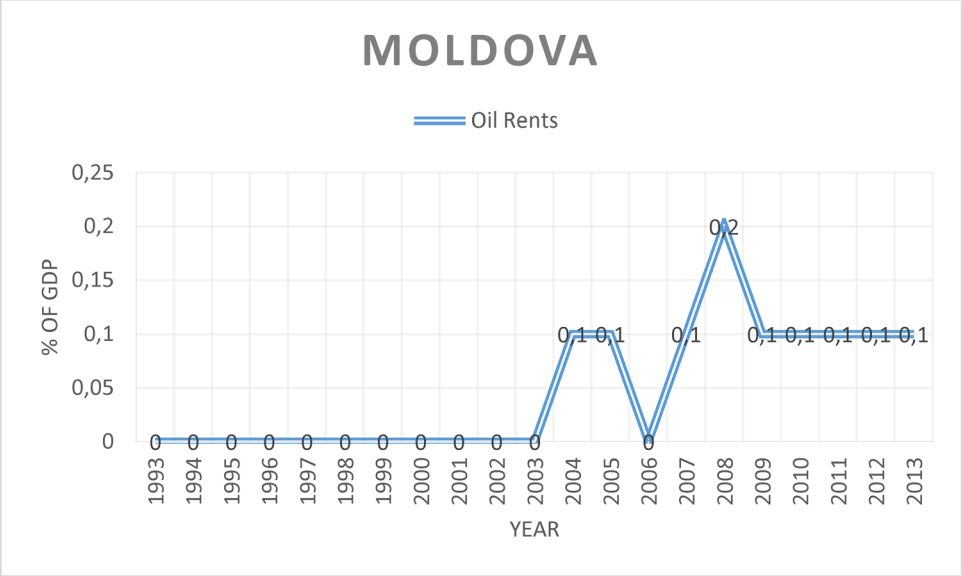
Until recently, Moldova had been 100 percent dependent on Russia to cover its demand for natural gas. Russia's energy giant *Gazprom* also has a 50 percent stake in Moldova's main energy company, now the joint venture *Moldovagaz*, whereas the Moldovan state owns 35.33 of the company and the separatist region Transnistria owns 1.23 percent.[206] In April of this year, a pipeline between Romania and Moldova, the Iasi-Ungheni Pipeline, became operational after construction was completed in 2014. The pipeline is currently delivering around 1 million cubic meters of natural gas to Western parts of Moldova, which is enough to serve 10,300 consumers. However, there are plans to extend the pipeline to the capitol city Chişinău and expand its transit capacity to 1.5 billion cubic meters per year, which would be sufficient to meet Moldova's yearly demand for natural gas.[207] The aim of the pipeline is to try to reduce Moldova's dependency on Russian gas deliveries and to

201 Cf. EIA 2014: 1.
202 This assessment is based on Mahdavy's classification of a rentier state presented above, which stipulates that a particular country can be considered a rentier state when it receives "on a regular basis substantial amounts of external rent" (Mahdavy 1970: 428).
203 Łoskot 2008: 311.
204 Cf. Yafimava 2011: 262.
205 Ibid. 264.
206 Ibid.
207 Cf. Government of Republic of Moldova 2015: 'Moldova starts gas imports from Romania' <http://www.mec.gov.md/en/content/moldova-starts-gas-imports-romania> (Accessed 01.08.2015).

diversify their sources.

Moldova does possess very small crude oil reserves, however they are not sufficiently plentiful to cover the country's demand.[208] Moldova relies primarily on Russia and, to a lesser extent, Romania to cover its need for petroleum products. In 2005, Moldova opened its first oil refinery in Comrat, however the facility is very small does not play a significant role in Moldova's domestic market for oil products.[209]

Figure 6: Moldova: The Amount of Energy Rents (1993-2013)



Source: World Bank: World Development Indicators

Since having gained independence, energy rents have played a miniscule role in Moldova's percentage of GDP, as displayed in Figure 6 above. According to data provided by the World Bank's World Development Indicators, Moldova has accrued no natural gas rents since 1993. Oil rents have been almost equally non-existent, peaking at 0.2% of GDP in 2008. These rents are likely due to Moldova's modest production of refined petroleum products and their export.[210] Between 1993 and 2013, energy rents made up, on average, circa 0.047% of Moldova's GDP. Moldova can therefore be categorized as a non-rentier state with a low amount of energy rents.

208 The CIA World Factbook puts Moldova's proven crude oil reserves at 7,330 barrels. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/md.html> (Accessed 01.08.2015).

209 Cf. Łoskot 2008: 314.

210 According to the CIA World Factbook, Moldova produced roughly 321 barrels of refined petroleum products per day in 2012, and exported 552 barrels per day. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/md.html> (Accessed 01.08.2015).

5.3. IV 2: The Degree of Russian External Leverage

5.3.1. Georgia

Due to the interwoven nature of Russia's military, political and economic levers in Georgia, they will not be presented in successive order. Out of the six countries included in this study, Georgia has been subject to the highest degree of external Russian leverage. This is particularly true regarding the three military levers included in the analysis, namely *"Military Interventions"*, *"Military Bases"* and *"Peacekeeping Forces"*. Firstly, Georgia received a "High" rating for "Military Interventions" due to the fact that Russia has intervened militarily in its South Caucasian neighbor both during the 1990s as well as in the brief 2008 war between Georgia and Russia.

Russia's first interventions in Georgia occurred during early 1990s, in the chaotic context of the Georgian Civil War, as well as armed conflicts between the Georgian state and the secessionist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. War between Georgia and South Ossetia commenced in December 1990, and war between Abkhazia and Georgia began almost two years later, in August 1992. In this chaotic situation, Russian presented itself as a power willing to foster peace and stability in its near abroad. However, rather than acting as an honest broker in its neighbor's tumultuous wars, "Russia has appeared to exploit the chaos in Georgia to the point where the independence-seeking Georgian state has been forced into the CIS and Moscow has assured Russia's continued military presence in the country".[211]

Russian assistance to Abkhazia, including troops, weapons and even airstrikes, was instrumental in the breakaway region's defeat of the Georgian army. Complicating matters even further for Eduard Shevardnadze, supporters of ousted president Gamsakhurdia launched a simultaneous rebellion against the president in the western province of Samegrelo. At this stage, Shevardnadze asked Moscow for assistance in putting down the rebellion, but Russian help came with a price, namely "the re-orientation of Georgia's foreign policy".[212] Georgia subsequently joined the CIS in 1993 and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in 1994, which was under Russian control.

These developments bear directly on the second military lever, namely *"Military Bases"*, rated as "High" in Georgia. As part of the agreement on Russian assistance in Georgia's civil war, four Russian military bases in Georgia[213] dating back to the Soviet period were to be maintained by Russian soldiers. Russian border troops were also introduced along Georgia's borders with Turkey and along its Black Sea coast. Considering the strategic location of Russian military bases throughout its territory, "Georgia not only lost its territorial integrity *de facto*, but partially also its sovereign-

211 Hill and Jewett 1994: 45.
212 Tagliavini 2009b: 5.
213 Russia's military bases in Georgia were located in: Batumi (Adjara), Gudauta (Abkhazia), Akhalkalaki (Samtskhe-Javakheti) and Vaziani (near Tbilisi).

ty".[214] Russian border troops would remain in Georgia until 1999. Russia's four military bases would not be vacated until 2007, after years of negotiations.

Russia's involvement in Georgia's various armed conflicts during the early 1990s also has direct bearing on the third military lever, namely *"Peacekeeping Forces"*, rated "High". Russia was instrumental in brokering the ceasefires in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Unlike in the war in Abkhazia, Russia played no discernable role in the hostilities in South Ossetia. Russia did, however, actively pressure Georgia[215] to accept Russian peacekeepers in order to end the fighting in the breakaway region, which threatened to spill over into North Ossetia in Russia. Russia took advantage of the conflict by forcing an agreement on Georgia in June 1992 and subsequently moving peacekeepers into the region in July, which gave Russia "its first permanent foothold in Georgia and initiated the first stage of the country's dismemberment".[216] In the case of Abkhazia, rebels launched an offensive in September 1993, which Georgia was unable to resist, while Russian feigned neutrality. Gamsakhurdia's simultaneous rebellion only further weakened Shevardnadze's position, who was in serious jeopardy of being overthrown. It was only after agreeing to join the CIS in October 1993 that Russia came to Georgia's assistance. After a ceasefire was signed in 1994, Russian peacekeeping operations, including roughly 3,000 Russian soldiers, began in Abkhazia in June 1994. Russia's saving of Shevardnadze's government "essentially produced a compliant government in the most anti-Russian region of the former Soviet Union. It was a clever manoeuver in the longer term effort to secure Georgia's commitment to reintegration with Russia".[217]

The presence of Russian peacekeeping forces in South Ossetia and Abkhazia played a key role in Russia's second military intervention in Georgia in August 2008. Throughout the summer of 2008, tensions had been rising between Georgia and both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. A series of provocations and what amounted to a low-intensity war between Georgia and South Ossetia continued to escalate and eventually spun out of control. On the night of August 7-8, Georgian forces launched a major attack on the capital of South Ossetia, Tskhinvali. This attack was followed by a ground invasion of Tskhinvali and surrounding areas in the early morning hours of August 8. Georgia's advance would, however, soon be halted by Russian armed forces. During Georgia's assault on South Ossetia, Russian peacekeeping forces were killed, which was used by Russia as a pretext to enter the conflict. Regarding Russia's counter attack, the *Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia* states the following:

214 Tagliavini 2009b: 5.

215 Regarding Russia's pressure exerted on Georgia to allow Russia to end the conflict, Dmitri Trenin writes that "Georgia was warned of grave political, economic and military consequences in case it did not stop its attacks on Zkhinvali: the Russian parliament would grant the South Ossetian request of joining Russia; sanctions would be imposed and Tbilisi itself […] could be bombed" (Trenin 1995: 135).

216 Hill and Jewett 1994: 48.

217 Hill and Jewett 1994: 60.

> In a counter-movement, Russian armed forces, covered by air strikes and elements from the Black Sea fleet, penetrated deep into Georgia, cutting across the country's main east-west road, reaching the port of Poti and stopping short of Georgia's capital city, Tbilisi. The confrontation developed into a combined inter-state and intra-state conflict, opposing Georgian and Russian forces at one level of confrontation as well as South Ossetians together with Abkhaz fighters and the Georgians at another.[218]

A ceasefire was eventually negotiated on August 12 between the Russian President Dmitri Medvedev, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili and the French President Nikolas Sarkozy. In the aftermath of the conflict, Russia cemented its positions in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia and eventually recognized both regions as being independent of Georgia. Russia maintains circa 5,000 troops in Abkhazia and around 3,000 troops in South Ossetia.[219]

With the exception of the political lever "Multilateral Organizations Dominated by Russia", Georgia received high ratings for the variable's political levers, including "Support of anti-Western Governments/Opposition to pro-Western Governments" and "Support of Secessionist Republics". As mentioned above, Russia has pursued a policy of "managed instability" regarding Georgia. This was especially the case after the Rose Revolution in 2003 and the election of pro-Western politician Mikheil Saakashvili, who was interested in increasing Georgia's integration with the West, including membership in EU and NATO. According to the Russian point of view, "the ouster of Shevardnadze was not a genuinely democratic event, but a plot orchestrated by Western powers to isolate and encircle Russia".[220]

With regards to the first political lever, Russia has both supported and opposed regimes in Georgia at different times, at a high level. As outlined above, Russia intervened and offered military support to Georgia in its war against Abkhaz fighters and anti-government rebels after Shevardnadze agreed to integrate Georgia into Russian-led political and military organizations, as well as to the stationing of Russian troops on Georgian territory. After 2004, Russia adopted a much more antagonistic stance towards Georgia and sought to oppose its new government. Initially, Russia's opposition to Georgia took the form of energy sanctions, linked to the economic lever *"Energy Monopoly"*, as well as trade embargos, which is also an economic lever ("*Trade Embargos*"). Regarding Russia's energy monopoly, Georgia has a medium level of dependency on Russia[221], however, before the BTC pipeline from Azerbaijan came online in 2008, Georgia was heavily reliant on Russia for natural gas deliveries. Russia exploited this dependency in order to punish the Georgian government politically. Commenting on this situation, Randall Newnham writes that "as with other defiant ex-So-

218 Tagliavini 2009a: 10.

219 See: Rukhadze 2013: 'Russia underscores its military presence in Georgia's breakaway regions' <http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=40952&no_cache=1#.VczM__ntmkp> (Accessed: 25.07.2015).

220 Karagiannis 2014: 403.

221 Cf. Balmaceda 2013: 24.

viet states, Georgia was subjected to massive gas price increases. From 2004 to 2006 the price demanded by Gazprom, the Russian state gas monopoly, increased by nearly 500 percent, from $50 to $235 per thousand cubic meters".[222] Georgia has also experienced a high level of trade embargos from Russia. After a ring of Russian spies was discovered and expelled from Georgia in 2006, Russia retaliated with trade embargos of Georgian wine, mineral water, fruits and vegetables. Considering Georgia's economic dependency on the Russian market, its economy was detrimentally affected.[223] The embargoes were subsequently lifted after the GD coalition came to power in 2014.

The political lever *"Support of Secessionist Republics"*, was also rated as "High". Russia's involvement in the breakaway regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the 1990s and in 2008 have already been extensively documented above. In addition to recognizing the two regions as independent in August 2008, Russia also distributed Russian passports to inhabitants, thus further strengthening its hold there. Regarding the political lever *"Multilateral Organizations Dominated by Russia"*, Georgia received a low rating. Between 1993 and 2008, Georgia was a member of the Russian lead CIS and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). However, after the war with Russia in 2008, Georgia exited the CIS. Georgia was briefly a member of the CSTO from 1994 to 1999.

5.3.2. Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan has been subjected to the lowest amount of Russian external leverage throughout the time span of this study. With regards to IV 2's three military levers, Azerbaijan received a rating of "Low" for both *"Military Interventions"* and *"Peacekeeping Forces"*, while obtaining a rating of "Medium" for *"Military Bases"*. Between 1993 and 2014, Azerbaijan experienced no Russian military interventions on its soil. For this reason, Azerbaijan received a low rating for *"Military Interventions"*. There have also been no instances of Azerbaijan having Russian peacekeepers present on its territory since 1993, which resulted in a low rating for this military lever. Azerbaijan was given the rating "Medium" for the lever *"Military Bases"* due to the fact that it hosted a Russian radar station in Gabala. The facility was built during the Soviet period and was used to monitor any possible ballistic missile launches emanating from the Middle East region. Russia leased the base from Azerbaijan from 2002 to 2012, paying the host country 7 million USD per year. As the lease was set to expire in 2012, negotiations were undertaken to extend Russia's lease of the facility. However, Azerbaijan reportedly increased the radar station's rent to $300 million USD per year, which in turn caused Russia to abandon the facility.[224] With the early-warning radar facility at Armavir in the Krasnodar region of Russia, Gabala had also become redundant for Russia.

222 Newnham 2015: 164.

223 As Newnham notes, "The Russian import restrictions not only not only impacted Georgia's overall trade balance […] They specifically impacted sectors which previously had depended on the Russian market. Before the boycotts, for example, Georgia had sent 80-90% of its wine exports to Russia" (Ibid. 166).

224 Cf. Herszenhorn 2012: 'Russia to close radar station in Azerbaijan' <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/12/world/europe/russia-to-shut-down-radar-station-in-azerbaijan.html?_r=0> (Accessed 05.08.2015).

Relative to other post-Soviet states, Russia has a limited capacity to influence the political trajectory of Azerbaijan. Commenting on this situation, Shahin Abbasov writes that "Moscow has limited levers with which to exert political or economic pressure on Baku. Unlike other former Soviet republics, Azerbaijan contains no large ethnic Russian minority, hosts no Russian military bases and has no Russian-controlled economic assets that could give Moscow political influence".[225] For the political levers *"Support of anti-Western Governments/Opposition to pro-Western Governments"*, Azerbaijan received a rating of "Low". Azerbaijan has successfully diversified both its political and economic ties to both regional countries as well as members of the EU. In terms of economic relations, the EU accounts for up to 42 percent of Azerbaijan's overall trade, while trade with states from the Russian-led EEU only makes up less than 10 percent of the country's foreign trade.[226] Furthermore, in the area of security policy, Azerbaijan has bought advanced military hardware from Israel and has signed an agreement on military cooperation with Turkey, which is a member of NATO.[227] Further deepening its regional ties, Azerbaijan and Iran have agreed to set up a joint mechanism for dealing with defense challenges. Iran has also offered to sale weapons to Azerbaijan, a proposal which is being considered by Baku.[228]

Azerbaijan received a rating of "Medium" for the political lever *"Support of Secessionist Republics"*, due to the frozen conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, which continues to claim both Azeri and Armenian lives. Regarding Russia's role in the decades old conflict, Neil Melvin from SIPRI writes the following:

> As the conflict progressed, a Russian position gradually emerged, focused on support for Armenia as a key ally in the Caucasus. Military aid; the basing of Russian troops in Armenia; an expansion of Russian-owned business into the republic; and the inclusion of Armenia within Russian integration projects, became the central planks of Russia's southern Caucasus policy. From Armenia's standpoint, its security relationship with Russia has become even more important as Azerbaijan has built up its military forces.[229]

Fierce clashes erupted along the line of contact in Nagorno-Karabakh in summer of 2014. The fighting was some of the heaviest in recent years and included heavy weaponry and led to the death of up to 20 combatants.[230] Despite having supported the Armenian side in the conflict, Russia has recently been selling weapons to both sides in the conflict, including an arms deal with Azerbaijan

225 See: Abbasov 2014: 'Azerbaijan avoids Moscow's embrace' <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/68701> (Accessed 04.08.2015).
226 See: Ibid.
227 See: Agayev 2014: 'Putin stirs Azeri angst that Russia is set to extend sway' <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-04-06/putin-stirs-azeri-angst-russia-will-seek-to-extend-sway> (Accessed: 02.08.2015).
228 See: Lomsadze 2015: 'Iran offers guns and friendship to Azerbaijan' <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/73071> (Accessed: 10.08.2015).
229 Melvin 2014: 'Nagorno-Karabakh: The not so frozen conflict' <http://russialist.org/nagorno-karabakh-the-not-so-frozen-conflict/> (Accessed: 05.08.2015).
230 Cf. Ibid.

worth 4 billion USD in 2014.[231] Regarding the final political lever *"Multilateral Organizations Dominated by Russia"*, Azerbaijan received a rating of "Medium". The medium rating is due to the fact that Azerbaijan remains a member of the CIS. It was previously a member of the CSTO, however it exited the military alliance in 1999, after having joined in 1994.

Considering Azerbaijan's vast energy wealth has been described extensively above in section 5.2.1, it will not be repeated here. Given the country's strong position regarding indigenous energy resources, Azerbaijan received a rating "Low" for the economic lever *"Energy Monopoly"*. The country also received a rating of "Low" for the economic lever "*Trade Embargos*", since no significant trade embargos have been imposed on the country by Russia during the time span of this study.

231 Cf. Melvin 2014.

6. Discussion of the Results

In this section, the results of the empirical test of the study's two hypotheses will be presented and analyzed. The hypotheses were derived from the literature on the rentier state theory as well as the scholarly debate on autocracy promotion. They were tested to determine their explanatory power regarding the deficiencies in democratic performance in the post-Soviet states located on the EU's eastern periphery, namely in Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus.

IV 1, which postulated a negative relationship between the level of energy rents at a government's disposal and its democratic performance, has been confirmed in this study. The two cases selected to test this hypothesis were Azerbaijan and Moldova, as they were the cases with the highest and lowest values on the side of the IV, respectively. Azerbaijan is by far the most resource-rich country examined in this study. Along with the Russian Federation and other post-Soviet states in the Caspian region, Azerbaijan is considered a post-Soviet rentier state par excellence. Discernable elements of the rentier state theory have been observable in Azerbaijan over the past two decades, including both the rentier effect and the repression effect. Commenting on the "spending effect", which is a part of the "rentier effect", Dayne Lukas Shaw writes that "this paradigm has emerged in Azerbaijan; patronage and corruption are core characteristics of the regime. It has permeated down from the Presidency to the lowest levels of the bureaucracy". In terms of the "repression effect", Azerbaijan spends a vast amount of its GDP on military and security services, which is "facilitated by rents derived from natural resources".

Throughout the time span of this study, the percentage of energy rents in Azerbaijan's GDP dropped below 30 percent only one time, namely in 1998, which was likely due to the Russian economic crisis and its knock-on effects in the region. Azerbaijan's energy rents as a percentage of GDP peaked between 2005 and 2008, topping out at 68.4 percent of GDP in 2006, and falling below 40 percent for the first time again in 2013. Regarding Azerbaijan's democratic performance, the country experienced minimal changes in its status as an "unfree" authoritarian state between 1993 and 2014. Due to modest liberalizations in civil liberties carried out by Alieyev senior, Azerbaijan received the Freedom House status of "partially free" from 1997 to 2002. However, following the transfer of power to Ilham Aliyev in 2003, Azerbaijan's civil liberty ratings have continued to diminish, and Azerbaijan's current political rights and civil liberties ratings are the exact as they were in 1993, however with a continuing downward trajectory. This downward trajectory is due to Azerbaijan's recent crackdown on independent media and NGOs.

Moldova, on the other hand, is an example of a resource poor country in the post-Soviet space, in which energy rents from point resources such as natural gas or oil have little to no relevance for the country's GDP. At their highest levels, the percentage of energy rents in the country's GDP peaked at the miniscule level of .2% of GDP in 2008. For the first ten years of this study, 1993 to 2003, Moldova accrued no income from natural gas or oil rents, according to the World Bank. Moldova's

democratic performance improved from a rating of "3" in 1993 to "5" in 2013, which saw the country move from the lower end of the status "partially free" to the higher end, however it remains a hybrid regime.

IV 2, which postulated that the higher the degree of external influence Russia exerts on a country, the lower its democratic performance, was not confirmed in this study. The two cases selected to test this hypothesis were Georgia and Azerbaijan. Of the six countries included in this study, Georgia was subjected to the highest degree of Russian external influence, whereas Azerbaijan was confronted with the least amount. In both cases, the hypothesis was unable to successfully explain the development of the respective country's democratic performance. Drawing upon the relevant literature on autocracy promotion in the post-Soviet space, Russia is categorized as a "black knight", i.e. a negative external actor in the post-Soviet space. The external Russian leverage which was exerted against Georgia during the study's time frame ranged from numerous military interventions, the stationing of peacekeepers in breakaway regions and the recognition of said regions as independent political entities, to trade embargos, energy sanctions and other measures meant to destabilize the political situation there. Russia's treatment of Georgia can be understood within the policy aim of managed instability, through which Russia attempts to destabilize Western-oriented regimes in its near abroad with the hope of achieving regime change and a political trajectory more in line with its interests. However, despite Russian meddling, or possibly as a result of it, Georgia's democratic performance improved from a rating of "3" in 1993 to a "5" in 2014, which represents a trajectory moving from the lower end of the "partially free" status to its upper limits.

With its vast oil and natural gas resources and lack of a significant Russian diaspora, Russian military bases or peacekeepers, Russia has considerably less leverage over Azerbaijan than other post-Soviet states in Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus. However, despite its lack of influence, Azerbaijan saw little to no positive development in its democratic performance between 1993 and 2014. Azerbaijan's democratic performance received a rating of "2" in 1993, and despite a brief period of liberalization in the late 1990s and the obtainment of the status "partially free", Azerbaijan's democratic performance diminished over the previous decade and half, and is currently rated as "2", however with a further downward tendency. In this context, Azerbaijan has remained an "unfree" authoritarian regime, despite the absence of Russian leverage exerted on other post-Soviet states. If the hypothesis had been correct, one would have expected Azerbaijan to have achieved improvements in its democratic performance over the past 20 years.

The fact that IV 2 was not confirmed and that Georgia's democratic performance improved despite significant Russian leverage over the country is, however, in line with the results of other studies on Russia's role in promoting autocracy in the post-Soviet space. One such study was conducted by Laure Delcour and Katatryna Wolczuk in their 2014 article 'Spoiler or facilitator of democratization? Russia's role in Georgia and Ukraine'. Delcour and Wolczuk stress the fact that many studies have focused simply on the negative effects of Russia's attempts to destabilize countries in

its neighborhood and subvert democratization. In this context, the two authors note that "by emphasizing the spoiling effects, the literature omits the positive (though unintended) effect of Russia's actions on strengthening democracy in the 'contested neighborhood'". Explaining the mechanisms underlying Russia's unintended and counter intuitive strengthening of the democratic performance of countries it seeks to undermine, Delcour and Wolczuk conclude that "such effects occur because Russia's initiatives to undermine [Georgia and Ukraine's] statehood actually weaken linkages and reduce the regional power's leverage over domestic elite and societies. In fact, Russia's actions have united the national elites and population (outside the 'breakaway' regions) around sovereignty, democracy, and integration with the West". Despite Russia's efforts, a broad consensus regarding further Western integration has persisted in Georgia, as well as in Ukraine.

In his 2015 article 'The limits of autocracy promotion: The case of Russia in the "near abroad"', Lucan Way comes to a similar conclusion as Delcour and Wolczuk. Way stresses the need to distinguish between authoritarian governments which promote non-democratic regimes supportive of their geopolitical agenda and "the promotion of authoritarianism as such". Regarding Russia's opposition to Georgia under president Mikheil Saakashvili and the eventual democratic transfer of power in 2013 which brought in political forces more accommodating to Russia, Way observes that "while it is possible that Russia somehow influenced these outcomes, this turnover augured an important milestone in Georgian democracy: the first peaceful transfer of governmental power. Georgia's Freedom House score became more, rather than less democratic in 2012 and 2013".

7. Conclusion

The goal of this study was to investigate the question as to why some post-Soviet states in Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus have only made modest gains in democratic performance since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, while others have stagnated or undergone authoritarian regressions. In order to address this question, a small-N comparative study was carried out using a positivist research design and methodology. As a first step in this study, the theoretical underpinning of the DV, namely democratic performance, was presented along with the definitions of key terms. In the following step, the variable's conceptualization and operationalization were explained.

Next, an overview of the scholarly debate of democratization was offered. It was from this debate that the theoretical underpinning of the study's two IVs was derived. The two theoretical approaches to explaining the democratic performance of states in the post-Soviet space included the scholarly debates of both the rentier state theory as well as the more recent literature on autocracy promotion. In order to test the explanatory power of these two approaches, two hypotheses were developed and subsequently tested. The hypothesis for IV 1 was as follows: The higher the amount of energy rents, the lower the democratic performance. The hypothesis for IV 2 postulated the following: The higher the degree of Russian external leverage, the lower the democratic performance. The time frame of the empirical study encompassed 1993 to 2014, in order to capture the entire range of developments which have taken place in the post-Soviet space following independence. The case studies which showed the greatest variation on the side of the IV were chosen for the empirical tests of the hypotheses. This lead to the selection of Azerbaijan (high) and Moldova (low) for IV 1, and Georgia (high) and Azerbaijan (low) for IV 2.

As a result of the empirical test, the hypothesis for IV 1, which connected higher amounts of energy rents with lower democratic performance, was confirmed. The rentier state theory proved to be a useful explanation for the low democratic performance of Azerbaijan, which, on average, derives circa 45% of its GDP from oil and natural gas rents. Moldova, for which oil and gas rents play a negligible role in its GDP, persistently improved its democratic performance over the course of the study's time frame.

The hypothesis for IV 2, which postulated that a higher degree of Russian external leverage would lead to a lower democratic performance, was falsified. Georgia, which was subjected to the highest degree of Russian external leverage between 1993 and 2014, improved its democratic performance from the low to the high end of the "partially free" status ("3" to "5"). Azerbaijan, on the other hand, which experienced the lowest amount of Russian external leverage, maintained a low democratic performance throughout the time span of this study, ending with the same rating, "2", and status, "unfree", as in 1993. While it may appear counterintuitive, this study, along with others, have shown that Russia's policy of managed instability and its undermining of regimes in its "near abroad" which oppose its geopolitical aims, sometimes has the unintended consequence of streng-

thening elite and public opinion regarding deeper integration with the West in the afflicted countries. Delcour and Wolczuk (2014) have shown similar outcomes in Ukraine, while Lucan Way (2015) has described similar processes taking place in both Moldova and Kyrgyzstan. Regarding Azerbaijan's democratic development, the rentier state theory proved to have sufficiently more explanatory power than Russian external influence.

Given the unintended results of Russia's attempts to negatively influence the democratic performance of neighboring states and their intention to pursue integration with the West, further research on both the negative and positive effects of external actors on regime change could represent a useful contribution to the current debate surrounding autocracy promotion and "black knights", i.e. negative external actors. This study did experience some difficulties, in particular with regards to empirical data for IV 1. Drawing upon Roland Götz's operationalization of energy rents, this study also wanted to include the transit rents as a percentage of GDP for the operationalization of IV 1. Transit rents are particularly relevant for Belarus and Ukraine, as well as Moldova and Georgia, however to a lesser extent. The inclusion of transit rents in the operationalization of IV 1 would have provided a more accurate picture regarding the percentage of GDP derived from energy rents in the post-Soviet space, however, due to the time constraints and a lack of reliable sources, transit rents had to be omitted from the analysis.

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Appendix

Table 11: Azerbaijan: Political Rights and Civil Liberties

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
PR	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
CL	2	2	2	3	4	4	4	3	3	3	3
Rating	2	2	2	2.5	3	3	3	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
	2004	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**
PR	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
CL	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2
Rating	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2	2

Source: Freedom House: Freedom in the World

Table 12: Georgia: Political Rights and Civil Liberties

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
PR	3	3	4	4	5	5	5	4	4	4	4
CL	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Rating	3	3	3.5	4	4.5	4.5	4.5	4	4	4	4
	2004	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**
PR	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5
CL	4	5	5	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5
Rating	4.5	5	5	4	4	4	4.5	4.5	5	5	5

Source: Freedom House: Freedom in the World

Table 13: Moldova: Political Rights and Civil Liberties

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
PR	3	4	4	5	5	6	6	6	6	5	5
CL	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Rating	3	4	4	4.5	4.5	5	5	5	5	4.5	4.5
	2004	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**
PR	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5
CL	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5
Rating	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4	4.5	5	5	5	5	5

Source: Freedom House: Freedom in the World

Table 14: Armenia: Oil and Natural Gas Rents as % of GDP

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Oil	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gas	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	2004	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	
Oil	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Gas	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Source: World Bank: World Development Indicators

Table 15: Azerbaijan: Oil and Natural Gas Rents as % of GDP

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Oil	23.9	24.9	28.6	34	24.9	15.7	27.5	44	35.5	33.8	34.9
Gas	8.8	8.8	10	12.7	8.9	5.6	4.9	10.7	9.2	5.5	8.1
Total	32.7	33.7	38.6	46.7	33.8	21.3	32.4	55.2	44.7	39.3	43
	2004	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	
Oil	40.4	55.9	62.2	57.5	56.2	39.5	44.2	42.8	38	33.9	
Gas	7.2	8.6	6.2	6.2	9.4	4.3	3.4	2.9	2.3	2.3	
Total	47.6	64.5	68.4	63.7	65.6	43.8	46.2	45.7	40.3	36.2	

Source: The World Bank: World Development Indicators

Table 16: Belarus: Oil and Natural Gas Rents as % of GDP

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Oil	1.1	1.1	1.3	1.5	1.4	0.7	1.4	2.4	2	1.7	1.7
Gas	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2
Total	1.2	1.2	1.4	1.6	1.5	1.8	1.5	2.6	2.2	1.8	1.9
	2004	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	
Oil	1.8	2	1.9	1.7	1.8	1.2	1.4	1.7	1.6	1.3	
Gas	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0	0	0	0	
Total	1.9	2.2	2	1.8	1.9	1.3	1.4	1.7	1.6	1.3	

Source: The World Bank: World Development Indicators

Table 17: Georgia: Oil and Natural Gas Rents as % of GDP

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Oil	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.5	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.6	0.4	0.3	0,6
Gas	0.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.2	0.1	0	0.1
Total	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.5	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.8	0.5	0.3	0.7
	2004	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	
Oil	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	
Gas	0	0.1	0.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Total	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	

Source: The World Bank: World Development Indicators

Table 18: Moldova: Oil and Natural Gas Rents as % of GDP

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Oil	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gas	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	2004	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	
Oil	0.1	0.1	0	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	
Gas	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Total	0.1	0.1	0	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	

Source: The World Bank: World Development Indicators

Table 19: Ukraine: Oil and Natural Gas Rents as % of GDP

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Oil	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.8	0.6	0.4	0.8	1.4	0.9	0.9	0.9
Gas	1.5	1.6	1.8	2.7	2.2	1.9	2.1	5.7	4.5	3	4.4
Total	2	2.1	2.4	3.5	2.8	2.3	2.9	7.1	5.4	3.9	5.3
	2004	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	
Oil	1	1.2	1.3	1	1,1	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.7	
Gas	3.9	4.8	3.7	2.8	3.3	2.1	1.6	1.5	1.1	1.1	
Total	4.9	6	5	3.8	4.4	3	2.5	2.4	1.9	1.8	

Source: The World Bank: World Development Indicators

Table 20: IV 2: Degree of Russian External Leverage – Sources

Levers	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine
Military Levers						
Military Interventions	Low	Low	Low	High[1]	Medium[2]	High[3]
Military Bases	Medium[4]	Medium[4]	High[4]	High[5]	Medium[4]	High[4]
Peacekeeping Forces	Low	Low	Low	High[6]	Medium[7]	Low
Political Levers						
Support of anti-Western Governments/Opposition to pro-Western Governments	Med[8]	Low	High[9]	High[10]	Medium[11]	High[9]
Support of Secessionist Republics	Low	Medium[8]	Low	High[1]	Medium[12]	High[3]
Multilateral Organizations Dominated by Russia	High[13]	Medium[14]	High[15]	Low	Medium[16]	Low
Economic Levers						
Energy Monopoly	Medium[17]	Low[18]	High[19]	Medium[19]	High[19]	High[19]
Trade Embargos	Low	Low	High[20]	High[21]	High[22]	Medium[23]

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